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ESSAYS

VOL. II.

ESSAYS

THEOLOGICAL AND LITERARY

By RICHARD HOLT HUTTON, M.A. (Lond.)

TWO VOLUMES

Vol. II.—LITERARY ESSAYS

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LITERARY ESSAYS.

I.

'GOETHE AND HIS INFLUENCE.'[1]

GOETHE tells us in his Autobiography, that while his mind was wandering about in search, of a religious system, and thus passing over the intermediate areas between the various regions of theological belief, he met with a certain phenomenon which seemed to him to belong to none of them, and which he used to call therefore *dæmonic* influence. "It was not divine, for it seemed unintellectual; nor human, for it was no result of understanding; nor diabolic, for it was of beneficent tendency; nor angelic, for you could often notice in it a

[1] 'The Life and Works of Goethe: with Sketches of his Age and Contemporaries, from published and unpublished sources.' By G. H. Lewes. 2 vols. Nutt, 1855.

'Freundschaftliche Briefe von Goethe und seiner Frau an Nicolaus Meyer, aus den Jahren 1800-1831.' Leipzig, Hartung, 1856. ('Friendly Letters from Goethe and his Wife to Nicolas Meyer, between the years 1800 and 1831.' Leipzig, 1856.)

certain mischievousness. It resembled chance, inasmuch as it demonstrated nothing; but was like providence, inasmuch as it showed symptoms of continuity. Everything which fetters human agency seemed to yield before it; it seemed to dispose arbitrarily of the necessary elements of our existence." It is not always, says this great observer of life, "the first and best, either in moral nature or in abilities," who possess this magnetic influence, and it is but rarely "that they recommend themselves by goodness of heart; but a gigantic force goes out of them, and they exercise an incredible power over all creatures, nay, even over the elements themselves; and who can say how far this influence may reach? All *moral* forces united are powerless against them. The masses are fascinated by them. They are only to be conquered by the universe itself," when they enter into conflict with it. Of course Goethe was thinking mainly of Napoleon, and men like him, as he afterwards told Eckermann, when he wrote this passage. Such men put forth, he says, a power, "if not exactly *opposite* to, yet at least *crossing*, that of the general moral order of the world; so that the one might be regarded as the woof, the other as the warp." He adds, that his life-long friend and patron, the Duke of Weimar, had this magnetic influence to such a degree that nobody could resist him, and no work of art ever failed in the poet's hands which the duke had suggested or approved. "He would have been enviable indeed if he could have possessed himself of my ideas and higher strivings; for

when the dæmon forsook him, and only the human was left, he knew not how to set to work, and was much troubled at it. In Byron this element was probably very active, giving him such powers of fascination, especially with women." Eckermann, with his usual delightfully child-like simplicity, anxiously asks, "Has not Mephistopheles traits of this nature?" "No," replies Goethe, "Mephistopheles is too negative a being. The dæmonic manifests itself in positive active power among artists. It is found often in musicians, more rarely among painters. In Paganini it shows itself to a high degree, and it is by means of it that he produces such great effects." Of himself he says, "it does not lie in my nature, but I am subject to its influence;" by which Goethe probably meant modestly to disclaim having any personal fascination of this kind over other men, but to indicate, what we know from other conversations he really held to be true, that apparently arbitrary and quite inexplicable impulses had often exercised the most decisive and frequently fortunate influence on his own career. But it is quite clear that Goethe did possess in no common degree this faculty for, in a certain sense, fascinating men by his presence, as well as by his writings. If Byron had more of it as a man, Goethe succeeded in imparting far more of it to his works, and neither his life nor works can be properly judged without reference to its influence. It is something quite distinct from mere beauty, power, or general merit, either of personal character or of literary creation. It is

a power which goes out from the individual man, and which can imprint itself only on such writings as carry with them the stamp of individual character; and not always even on those, if, as for example in the case of Byron's earlier works, the play of character is a good deal merged in some exaggerated mood of sentiment. It is not intensity: numbers of writers have surpassed Goethe in the intensity both of literary and personal characteristics. Schiller was a man of far keener and intenser, though narrower nature, and yet he could not help going into utter captivity to the calm and somewhat limply-constituted mind of his Weimar friend. It is not even in itself independence or strength of will; for though Goethe had this in a remarkable degree, many others, as probably Schiller, had possessed it in as high a degree, who were quite destitute of his fascinating talent. If it be expressible in one phrase at all (which it is not), it might be called *presence of mind in combination with a keen knowledge of men;*—I mean that absolute and complete adequacy to every emergency which gave Napoleon his *sang froid* at the very turning-point of his great battles, and which in the literary world has secured for Johnson his Boswell, and for Goethe his Eckermann. Johnson, indeed, was immeasurably Goethe's inferior in the range of his experience, and, what is of more importance, in his knowledge of man; but he was perhaps his superior in mere presence of mind, and hence was greater in conversation, but less in fascination. The Duke of Wellington had nearly as much presence

of mind as Napoleon himself; but he had immeasurably less of the other element of fascination—instinctive knowledge of men, and knowledge how to use them.

Goethe is almost unrivalled in the literary world in the degree in which he combines these qualities. Shakespeare may have had them equally, but his dramas are too impersonal to tell us clearly what kind of individual influence he put forth. I should conjecture that his sympathy with men was too vivid to have enabled him to keep, as was the case with Goethe, a part of himself as a permanent reserve-force outside the actual field of action, and ready to turn the flank of any new emergency. Shakespeare can scarcely have been so uniformly able to *detach* himself, if he would, from the sympathies and passions of the moment as Goethe certainly was; for Goethe, like the little three-eyed girl (*Dreiäuglein*) in the German tale, had always an extra organ besides the eyes he slept and wept with, to take note of his own sleep and his own tears, and an extra will, subject to the command of the third eye, ready to rescue the ordinary will from the intricacies of human emotion. Shakespeare's knowledge of life was, I should think, less drawn from constant vigilance and presence of mind in the passing moment (to which I imagine him to have abandoned himself far more completely than Goethe), and more from the power of memory and imagination to reproduce those sympathies again. However this may be, Shakespeare has himself sketched, less perhaps this cool presence of mind itself, than the effect which

it produces on other men, in his picture of Octavius Cæsar. Cæsar's cool self-possessed eye for every emergency, and for the right use of human instruments, and its paralysing effect on Antony's more attaching and passionate power of character, is a striking example of what Goethe would have called the "dæmonic" element in human affairs—the element that fascinates men by at once standing out clear and quite independent of their support, and yet indicating the power to read them off and detect for them their own needs and uses. There is always in this kind of magnetic power something repulsive at first; but if the repulsion be overcome, the attraction becomes stronger than ever; there is a resistance while the mind of the disciple is striving to keep its independence and conscious of the spell,—an intense devotion after he has once relinquished it, and consented to be a satellite. So the soothsayer tells Antony,—

> "Thy demon, that's thy spirit which keeps thee, is
> Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
> Where Cæsar's is not; but near him, thy angel
> Becomes a fear, as being overpowered; therefore
> Make space enough between you."

And Goethe, who had, as he says, himself experienced the force of this blind fascination in the Duke of Weimar's influence over him, as well as wielded it in no slight degree, tells Eckermann (himself a captive), "The higher a man stands, the more he is liable to this dæmonic influence; and he must take constant care that his guiding will be not diverted by it from the straight

way. . . . This is just the difficult point,—for our better nature stoutly to sustain itself, and yield to the dæmonic no more than is reasonable."

In Goethe himself this fascinating power existed as strongly as it is well possible to conceive in a man whose whole intellectual nature was of the sympathetic and contemplative, rather than of the practical cast,—who had no occasion to "use" men except as literary material,—and who, while he stood out independent of them, and could at will shake off from his feet the dust of long association, yet felt *with* them as one who understood their nature and had entered into their experience. Goethe's sympathetic and genial insight into man would have been a pure embarrassment to a practical cold-tempered tool-seeker like Napoleon, who never deciphered men through sympathy, but always by an instinctive tact for detecting masterly and workmanlike instruments. And *vice versâ*, the imperturbable self-possession and Napoleonic *sang-froid* of judgment that underlay in Goethe all storms of superficial emotion, was no little embarrassment to him in many of his literary moods. It prevented him, we think, from ever becoming a great dramatist. He could never lose himself sufficiently in his creations: yet it was emphatically this which gave that peculiar and undefinable fascination to those minutely-accurate observations on life with which all his later prose works and his conversations are so thickly stocked. You can clearly see that men of strong nature did not submit to Goethe's magnetic influence without a struggle.

Schiller, at first intensely repelled from him, was only gradually subdued, though thoroughly and strangely magnetised into idolatry by personal converse. Herder's keen and caustic nature vibrated to the end between the intense repulsion he felt for Goethe's completely *un*-moral genius,—the poet's impartial sympathy for good and evil alike,—and the irresistible attraction which his personal influence exerted. Only those could thoroughly cling to Goethe from the first who were not conscious of having any strong intellectual independence to maintain. Women, who love nothing so much as a completely independent self-sustained nature, especially if joined with thorough insight into themselves, were purely fascinated at once. Wieland, who had no intellectual ground to fight for, surrendered without terms. But no man of eminent ability and a different school of thought seemed to approach him without some sense that, if exposed constantly to his immediate influence, he had to choose between fascination and aversion. Hence his *very* few intimate male friends: scarcely any man at all able to enter into his mind and share his deeper interests, was likely to be found who could go so completely into captivity to his modes of thought; and, tolerant as he was, the centrifugal force of his mind threw off, to a certain respectful distance, all that the attractive force was not able to appropriate as part of itself. There has been a very similar effect produced by his writings on those even who did not know the man. Novalis fluttered round them, repeatedly expressing his aversion,

like a moth round a candle. They invariably repel, at first, English readers with English views of life and duty. As you read more and more, and the characteristic atmosphere of the man distils into your life, you find the magnetic force coming strongly over you ;—you are as a man mesmerised ;—you feel his calm independence of so much on which you helplessly lean, combined with his thorough insight into that desire of yours to lean, drawing you irresistibly towards the invisible intellectual centre at which such independent strength and such genial breadth of thought was possible. And yet you feel that you would be in many and various ways lowered in your own eyes if you could think completely as he thought and act as he acted. It becomes a difficult problem, in the presence of so much genius, and beneath so fascinating an eye, "for our better nature stoutly to sustain itself and yield to the dæmonic no more than is reasonable."

Let me attempt to contribute to the solution of this difficulty by some account and criticism of Goethe's life and genius in connection with that personal character which so subtly penetrates all he has written. Carlyle mistook completely when he said that Goethe, like Shakespeare, leaves little trace of himself in his creations. To a fine eye this is not even true of Shakespeare, though Shakespeare leaves no *immediate* stamp of himself, and critical inference alone can discern him in his works ; but far less is it true of Goethe. A rarefied self no doubt it is—a highly distilled gaseous essence ; but

every where, penetrating all he writes, there is the ethereal atmosphere which travelled about with Johann Wolfgang Goethe.

Mr. Lewes's volume gives us a very able and interesting biography,—a book, indeed, of permanent value; the incidents illustrating character, though not quite exhausting his materials, are disposed with skill, and the artistic criticism, while thoroughly appreciating Goethe's transcendent poetical genius, is independent, sensible, and English. From his moral criticism of Goethe, and sometimes, though not so frequently, from the poetical, I very widely dissent, and hope to give the grounds of my dissent. Something more too might have been done in the way of defining his individual position both as a poet and as a man. But it is impossible to deny Mr. Lewes high merit for the candour of his biography. Where Goethe has been most censured, he gives all the facts without reserve; and he does not go into any helpless captivity to the poet and artist. He gives his readers the elements for forming their own moral judgments, and he has shaken off from his feet the ponderous rubbish of the German scholiasts. Herr Düntzer and his colleagues are skilfully used in Mr. Lewes's book; but they are also skilfully ignored. Mr. Lewes has not submitted himself to Carlyle's somewhat undiscriminating, strained, and lashed-up furor of adoration for every word that the German sage let drop. There is, by the way, nothing more remarkably illustrative of Goethe's "dæmonic" influence than Carlyle's worship of him. Except in his

permanent unfailing self-possession, Goethe lacked almost all the personal qualities which usually fascinate that great writer's eye. And accordingly there runs through the essays on Goethe a tone of arduous admiration,—a helpless desire to fix on some characteristic which he could infinitely admire,—betraying that he was in subjection to the "eyes behind the book," not to the thing which is said in it.. There was nothing of the rugged thrusting power of Johnson, of the imperious practical faith of Cromwell, of the picturesque passion of Danton, of the kingly fanaticism of Mahomet; nothing, in short, of the intensity of nature which Carlyle always needs behind the sagacity he worships. Mr. Lewes reports a rather affected piece of Carlylese, delivered by the Latter-day oracle in Piccadilly upon one of the injurious attacks that had been directed against Goethe. Carlyle stopped suddenly, and with his peculiar look and emphasis said, "Yes, it is the wild cry of amazement on the part of all spooneys that the Titan was not a spooney too! Here is a godlike intellect, and yet you see he is not an idiot! not in the least a spooney!" This was hardly true of Goethe; and we strongly suspect that Mr. Carlyle was resisting a secret feeling that there was a limpness and want of concentration in Goethe's whole nature intellectual and moral, from the results of which his imperturbable presence of mind and great genius barely saved him; that he did in consequence go sometimes beyond the brink of spooneyishness in early days, and across the verge of very unreal "high art" in

later life. These are just the defects to which Mr. Carlyle is most sensitive. It is true Goethe never was in danger of permanently sinking into either abyss; for his head was always cool, and his third eye, at least, always vigilant. But it may perhaps account for the unusual failure of our great essayist in delineating Goethe, that the poet's wonderful writings were less the real object of his admiration than the strange fascination of the character behind. In my very brief sketch of the poet's life, I shall, so far as possible, select my illustrations from passages or incidents passed over in Mr. Lewes's volumes, wherever they seem to be equally characteristic.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe, born at noon on the 28th August, 1749, in Frankfort-on-the-Maine, seems to have inherited his genial, sensitive, sensuous, and joyous temperament from his mother; and from his father, the pride, self-dependence, and magnificent formality, the nervous orderliness, perseverance, and the microscopic minuteness of eye, by which, at least after the first rush of youth was gone by, he was always distinguished. His mother was but eighteen when he was born. She was a lively girl, full of German sentiment, with warm impulses, by no means much troubled with a conscience, exceedingly afraid of her husband, who was near twenty years her senior, and seemingly both willing and skilful in the invention of occasional white lies adapted to screen her children from his minute, fidgetty, and rather austere superintendence. She "spoiled" her children on principle, and made no pretence of conducting a systematic

training which she abhorred. She said of herself in after-years, that she could "educate no child, was quite unfit for it, gave them every wish so long as they laughed and were good, and whipped them if they cried or made wry mouths, without ever looking for any reason why they laughed or cried."[1] Her belief in Providence was warm with German sentiment, and not a little tinged with superstition. She rejoiced greatly when her son published the 'Confessions of a Beautiful Soul,' which she loved as a memorial of a lost pietistic friend. Her religion was one of emotion rather than of moral reverence. She was generous and extravagant, and, after her husband's death, seems to have spent capital as well as income. She was passionately fond of the theatre; a taste which she transmitted to her son. Her hearty simplicity of nature made her universally loved. Her servants loved and stayed with her to the last. She seems to have had at least as much humour as her son, which, for Germans, was not inconsiderable, and not much more sense of awe. She gave the most detailed orders for her own funeral, and even specified the kind of wine and the size of the cracknels with which the mourners were to be regaled; ordering the servants not to put too few raisins into the cakes, as she never could endure that in her life, and it would certainly chafe her in her grave. Having been invited to go to a party on the day on which she died, she sent for answer that

[2] Letter to her granddaughter—Düntzer's 'Frauenbilder,' p. 544.

"Madame Goethe could not come, as she was engaged just then in dying."[1] Yet her sensitiveness was so great, that she always made it a condition with her servants that they should never repeat to her painful news that they had picked up accidentally, as she wished to hear nothing sad without absolute necessity. And during her son's dangerous illness at Weimar, in 1805, no one ventured to speak to her of it till it was past, though she affirmed that she had been conscious all the time of his danger without the heart to mention it. This peculiarity Goethe inherited. Courageous to the utmost degree in all physical danger, he could never bear to encounter mental pain which he could any how escape. He invented soft paraphrases to avoid speaking of the death of those he had loved, and indeed of all death. Writing to Zelter of his own son's death, he says, "the staying-away (Aeussenbleiben) of my son has weighed dreadfully upon me in many ways." And his feeling was so well-known, that his old friend and mistress, the Frau von Stein, who died before him, directed that her funeral should not pass his door, lest it should impress him too painfully. No one dared to tell him of Schiller's death; and so it was also at the death of his wife's sister, and in other cases. Indeed, his constant unwillingness manfully to face the secret of his own anguish, was a principal source of a shade of unreality in a generally very real character. He habitually evaded the task of fathoming

[1] Düntzer's 'Frauenbilder,' p. 583.

the meaning and the depth of suffering. He avoided all contact with keen pain. He could not bear, although in the neighbourhood, to visit his brother-in-law at a time when his sister's child was dying. It was not weakness,—it was his principle of action ; and the effect remains in his works. He writes like a man who had not only experienced but explored every reality of human life except that of anguish and remorse. The iron that enters into the soul had found him too; but instead of fronting it as he fronted all other realities of life, and pondering its teaching to the last letter, he drew back from it with what speed he might. *This* experience even his Faust wants. Remorse, grief, agony, Goethe gently waived ; and, by averting his thoughts, softened them gradually without exhausting their lesson. Hence his passion never reaches the deepest deep of human life. It can glow and melt, but is never a consuming fire. His Werther, Tasso, Ottilie, and Clärchen, suffer keenly, but never *meet* the knife-edge. There is nothing in his poems like the courageous reality of suffering which vibrates through some of Shelley's lyrics and his 'Cenci.' The fascination of pain he can paint, but not the conquest of the will over its deeper aspect of *terror*. The temperament he inherited from his mother. But to him was granted a conspicuously despotic will, which should have enabled him to sound this depth also.

From his father it is far more difficult to say what qualities of mind Goethe inherited. The old man had always worried his family ; and it became fashionable

among the poet's friends, who were enthusiastic about his mother, to ignore or depreciate the old counseller, and they seem to have regarded it as a "mercy" when "Providence removed him." There are, however, one or two incidents in the Autobiography which convey an impression that his affection for his children was as real and deep as even that of his wife. He was a formal man, with strong ideas of straight-laced education, passionately orderly (he thought a good book nothing without a good binding), and never so much excited as by a necessary deviation from the "pre-established harmony" of household rules. He could not submit to the inevitable. He was the kind of man who is so attached to his rules, that if he cannot shatter the obstacles of circumstance, he thinks it next best to let the obstacles of circumstance shatter him. He had none of his son's calm presence of mind. But whatever perseverance of temper Goethe had, he probably gained from his father. He could not bear to do anything superficially. He was as thorough (*gründlich*, as the Germans say) in preparing Wolfgang for the coronation of the emperor by an exhaustive investigation into the authorities for every ceremony to be observed, as in teaching him the civil law. Einleitung, Quellen, &c., were all raked carefully up; for was not the coronation a part of the 'Entwickelung der Geschichte'? He had the formal notions about every thing, considered rhyme the essence of poetry, and believed that pictures, like wine, improved in value by mere keeping. He taught his children himself, and

completely alienated his daughter by his dry and exacting manner. But he was at least in earnest with his task. He began to learn both English and drawing at the same time with his children, that his own participation in their efforts might spur them on. He copied all his children's drawing-copies "with an English lead-pencil upon the finest Dutch paper; and not only observed the greatest clearness of outline, but most accurately imitated the hatching of the copies with a light hand. He drew the whole collection, number by number, while we children jumped from one head to another just as we pleased." This is very characteristic of his son's genius in later years, at least in the microscopic detail. After the first outburst of the poet's youthful passion, the lad took a sudden fancy for rude fragmentary drawings from nature, on all sorts of odd gray scraps of paper. And of this time he tells us, "the pedagogism of my father, on this point too, was greatly to be admired. He kindly asked for my attempts, and drew lines round every imperfect sketch. . . . The irregular leaves he cut straight, and thus made the beginning of a collection in which he wished at some future time to rejoice in the progress of his son." There seems to me real tenderness here. He was a proud man, who had drawn back into himself at the first repulse, from civic politics; and was hardly reconciled to his son's adhesion to the Weimar Court, because he dreaded lest some ducal caprice should bring mortification to his family pride.

The poet was born, as he himself records, with that sedate kind of humour in which alone he excelled, with a "propitious horoscope." There was clear anticipation in it of the special worship of young ladies, and of a general sceptre over earth and air. "The sun stood in the sign of the Virgin, and was culminating for the day." Jupiter and Venus were friendly; (little Pallas, undiscovered for another half century, must surely have lent a helping ray); Mercury was not adverse; Mars and Saturn indifferent; "the moon alone, just full, exerted the power of her opposition, all the more as she had reached her planetary hour; she therefore resisted my birth, which could not be accomplished till this hour was passed."

Frankfort was a busy old-fashioned town, with old walls and new walls, full of lingering traditions and gray customs still surviving, which served as an antique poetic frame for its changing pictures of motley German life. Goethe remembered his childish exploring expeditions about the old walls, moats, towers, and posterns, with great delight. Directly behind his father's house was a large area of gardens, to which the family had no access, stretching away to the walls of the city. The boy used often to gaze on this forbidden Eden in evening hours from a room in the second story called the garden-room. Even after the lapse of sixty years, the many-coloured picture of these gardens,—the solitary figures of careful neighbours stooping to tend their flowers, the groups of skittle-players, and the bands of merry children,—all

blended together in the warm sunset — the floating sounds of many voices, of the rolling balls, and the dropping ninepins—would again beset his imagination, bringing with them many a "tale of visionary hours."

Mr. Lewes remarks that the child's character frequently presents far more distinctly the ground-plan of the matured man's than the youth's, since the proportions of the whole are often completely disguised by the temporary caprices of newly-expanded passions and newly-gained freedom. This is, at all events, extremely true of Goethe, and is generally true of all casts of character where the permanent influence of a manly conscience does not start forth into life along with the new powers and new freedom it is to control. The sense of responsibility and moral freedom, once awakened, does not again subside, and where searching moral convictions have once taken hold on the character, the subsidence of youthful impetuousness does not give back again the characteristic features of childhood; but in Goethe this element was always faint, and the difference between the child's mind and the man's was only a difference in maturity of powers; when the spring-tide of youth fell back, his inward life was as it had been, only that all was stronger and riper. He was a reflective, old-fashioned, calmly-imaginative child, always fascinated by a mystery, but never, properly speaking, *awed* by it. It kindled his imagination; it never subdued him. He was full of wonder, and quite without veneration. In the "altar to the Lord" which the child

secretly built on a music-stand of his father's at seven years of age, and on which he burnt incense in the shape of a pastil, until he found that it was at the risk of injuring his altar, he was innocently playing with a subject which to almost any other child would have been too sacred for imaginative amusement. He was evidently charmed with the picturesqueness of the patriarchal sacrifices, and thought with delight of the blue smoke rising up to heaven beneath the first beam of the rising sun: of the religious feeling, the desire to *give up* anything of his own out of love to God, he had not of course any idea;—that in a child of seven no one would expect. But what is characteristic, is the absence of any restraining awe, in thus mingling the thought of God with his play at an age when he had already begun to think whether it was just in Him to send earthquakes and storms. Religion was already to him what it ever continued to be,—not the communion with holiness, but at most a graceful development of human life, a fountain of cool mystery playing gratefully over the parched earth. Mr. Lewes has translated a delightful anecdote of Goethe's relation to his mother, from Bettina von Arnim's account. That bold young lady's authority is generally more than questionable; here, however, there is the strongest evidence of internal truth:—

"This genial, indulgent mother employed her faculty for story-telling to his and her own delight. 'Air, fire, earth, and water, I represented under the forms of princesses; and to all natural pheno-

mena I gave a meaning, in which I almost believed more fervently than my little hearers. As we thought of paths which led from star to star, and that we should one day inhabit the stars, and thought of the great spirits we should meet there, I was as eager for the hours of story-telling as the children themselves; I was quite curious about the future course of my own improvisation, and any invitation which interrupted these evenings was disagreeable. There I sat, and there Wolfgang held me with his large black eyes; and when the fate of one of his favourites was not according to his fancy, I saw the angry veins swell on his temples, I saw him repress his tears. He often burst in with 'But, mother, the princess won't marry the nasty tailor, even if he does kill the giant.' And when I made a pause for the night, promising to continue it on the morrow, I was certain that he would in the meanwhile think it out for himself, and so he often stimulated my imagination. When I turned the story according to his plan, and told him that he had found out the *dénouement*, then was he all fire and flame, and one could see his little heart beating underneath his dress! His grandmother, who made a great pet of him, was the confidant of all his ideas as to how the story would turn out; and as she repeated these to me, and I turned the story according to these hints, there was a little diplomatic secrecy between us, which we never disclosed. I had the pleasure of continuing my story to the delight and astonishment of my hearers, and Wolfgang saw with glowing eyes the fulfilment of his own conceptions, and listened with enthusiastic applause.'"

His self-command and self-importance showed themselves early. He once waited resolutely for many minutes till school-time was "up," though his schoolfellows were lashing his legs with switches till they bled, before he would defend himself by a single movement; and then he fell upon them with immense success. Like all petted children, he did not like school; his pride was hurt by the unrespecting self-assertion of the republic around him. His most intimate friends were usually women and younger men. He never

could endure to be laughed at. Herder's rather vulgar pun on his name (Göthe), made in college days,—

"Thou, the descendant of gods, or of Goths, or of gutters,[4]"—

was perhaps a little annoying for the time; but it clearly rankled in his mind; and he mentions it bitterly forty years later, after Herder's death, in the course of a very kindly criticism, as an instance of the sarcasm which rendered Herder often unamiable; characteristically adding this most true principle of etiquette, "the proper name of a man is not like a cloak, which only hangs about him, and at which one may at any rate be allowed to pull and twitch; but it is a close-fitting garment, which has grown over and over him, like his skin, and which one cannot scrape and flay without injuring him himself." As a small boy he is said to have walked in an old-fashioned way, in order to distinguish himself from his schoolfellows, and to have told his mother, "I *begin* with this. Later on in life I shall distinguish myself in far other ways." One cannot help thinking a little judicious whipping and *nonchalance* at home might at this period have been of some service to him. Yet the 'oracular' so entered into his nature, that one could ill spare it now from his essence. It lends a certain antique grandeur to the light leaves of poetry that are twined round it.

His minute self-observation early showed itself. The

[4] In German "Koth," literally "mud."

following recollection in his Autobiography is extremely characteristic :—

"We boys held a Sunday assembly, where each of us was to produce original verses. And here I was struck by something strange, which long caused me uneasiness. My poems, whatever they might be, always seemed to me the best. But I soon remarked that my competitors, who brought forth very lame affairs, were in the same condition, and thought no less of themselves. Nay, what appeared yet more suspicious, a good lad (though in such matters altogether unskilful), whom I liked in other respects, but who had his rhymes made by his tutor, not only regarded these as the best, but was thoroughly persuaded they were his own, as he always maintained in our confidential intercourse. Now, as this illusion and error was obvious to me, the question one day forced itself upon me, whether I myself might not be in the same state—whether those poems were not really better than mine, and whether I might not justly appear to those boys as mad as they to me? This disturbed me much and long; for it was altogether impossible for me to find any external criterion of the truth; I even ceased from producing, until at length I was quieted by my own light temperament, and the feeling of my own powers."

He could not see then that what really distinguished him above his schoolfellows was not near so much, probably, the excellence of his verses, as the power of detecting and applying to his own case the general law of self-deception.

Goethe was, as he intimates in 'Wilhelm Meister,' in a passage well known to be in fact autobiographical, a very inquisitive child, and as unscrupulous as spoiled children are in gratifying his inquisitiveness. His childish fondness for the 'store-room' is rather universal and human than individual and personal. "More than any other of the young ones I was in the habit

of looking out attentively to see if I could notice any cupboard left open, or key standing in its lock." There are few minuter bits of life in his writings than his description of the predatory excursion into the store-room one Sunday morning, when the key had not been withdrawn. "I marked this oversight," he says. He pilfered, however, with less than his usual self-possession; the cook made a "stir in the kitchen," and even Goethe was flurried. But he seems to have had none of the ordinary childish shame and self-reproach connected with the adventure;—his favourite puppets were always dearer to him because of the "French-plum" fragrance which they had acquired in the scene of theft.

His delight in the theatre was the same through life. He liked the little mystery. He liked still better to have the key to the mystery. He was as quick as any child at a pantomime to find out "the man in the bear;" but it did not destroy his pleasure, especially if he was able to be "the man in the bear" himself; and besides, his heart was always in his eyes. But what mainly fascinated him in the theatre, I think, was its condensation and concentration of life into one consecutive piece. His imagination was wandering, digressive, microscopic, incoherent; he had the greatest difficulty in grasping in one vision a consecutive whole. He saw vivid points in succession, and saw the continuity and growth; but his sight was like the passing of a microscope over a surface,—it laid bare the transition, but did not give a connected vision. He saw too intensely and too far

at each point to be able to sweep his eye quickly over the whole. The theatre helped to remedy this defect, and he was grateful to it; but for that very reason he never could write successfully for the theatre. The boy's passion for the theatre had one very bad effect. During the French occupation of Frankfort he (then a lad of ten to twelve years old) had a free admission to the French theatre, which he used daily, accompanied by no older friend. His mother unwisely obtained the reluctant permission of his father that he should go; and his consequent quick progress in French reconciled his father to the habit. The lad had constant access behind the scenes and in the green-room along with his young French companions. Here I have little doubt the natural delicacy of his mind was first rubbed off. Probably he was constitutionally deficient in that element of mind which shame and reverence have in common (*αἰδώς*, as the Greeks called it); and during the French occupation of Frankfort, at a most susceptible age, he was subjected to influences that would be likely to have endangered the most delicate of natures. He was too young, his friends imagined, for danger; but certainly he was not at all too young for that kind of morbid curiosity about evil which is often more tainting than evil itself. Even in the late-written autobiographical recollections of his youth this is distinctly visible.

At the age of fourteen he was a great tale-composer; and one of these tales, 'The New Paris,' full of the genius of his later years, he has preserved in his Auto-

biography. It is a most characteristic tale, brimming over with the self-importance of the boy, and full also of the fanciful grace, the mysterious simplicity, and the simple mysteriousness of his older compositions. It is far the most graceful of his short tales; and must, I think, have received some touches from his older hand. For my own part, I greatly prefer it to the second part of 'Faust.' But the childlike delight in puzzling his readers is the same. The scene of the fairy-tale, which is autobiographic, is laid in gardens discovered by him beyond the old wall of the city. The tale ends with the following charming mystery :—

"The porter did not speak another word; but before he let me pass the entrance, he stopped me, and showed me some objects on the wall over the way, while at the same time he pointed backwards to the door. I understood him; he wished to imprint the objects on my mind, that I might the more certainly find the door which had unexpectedly closed behind me. I now took good notice of what was opposite to me. Above a high wall rose boughs of extremely old nut-trees, which partly covered the cornice at the top. The branches reached down to a stone tablet, the ornamented border of which I could perfectly recognise, though I could not read the inscription. It rested on the corbel of a niche, in which a finely-wrought fountain poured water from cup to cup into a great basin, that formed, as it were, a little pond, and disappeared in the earth. Fountain, inscription, nut-trees, all stood directly one above another; I would paint it as I saw it.

"Now, it may well be conceived how I passed this evening and many following days, and how often I repeated to myself this story, which even I could hardly believe. As soon as it was in any degree possible, I went again to the Bad Wall to refresh my remembrance, at least of these signs, and to look at the precious door. But, to my great amazement, I found all changed. Nut-trees, indeed, overtopped the wall, but they did not stand immediately in contact. A

tablet also was inserted in the wall, but far to the right of the trees, without ornament, and with a legible inscription. A niche with a fountain there was far to the left, but with no resemblance whatever to that which I had seen; so that I almost believed that the second adventure was, like the first, a dream; for of the door there is not the slightest trace. The only thing that consoles me is the observation, that these three objects seem always to change their places. For in repeated visits to the spot, I think I have noticed that the nut-trees have moved somewhat nearer together, and that the tablet and the fountain seem likewise to approach each other. Probably, when all is brought together again, the door, too, will once more be visible; and I will do my best to take up the thread of the adventure. Whether I shall be able to tell you what further happens, or whether it will be expressly forbidden me, I cannot say.

"This tale, of the truth of which my playfellows vehemently strove to convince themselves, was received with great applause. Each of them visited alone the place described, without confiding it to me or the others, and discovered the nut-trees, the tablet, and the spring, though always at a distance from each other; as they at last confessed to me, because it is not easy to conceal a secret at that early age. But here the contest first arose. One asserted that the objects did not stir from the spot, and always maintained the same distance: a second averred that they did move, and that too away from each other: a third agreed with the latter as to the first point of their moving, though it seemed to him that the nut-tree, tablet, and fountain rather drew near together: while a fourth had something still more wonderful to announce, which was, that the nut-trees were in the middle, but that the tablet and the fountain were on sides opposite to those which I had stated. With respect to the traces of the little door they also varied. And thus they furnished me an early instance of the contradictory views men can hold and maintain in regard to matters quite simple and easily cleared up. As I obstinately refused the continuation of my tale, a repetition of the first part was often desired. I was on my guard, however, not to change the circumstances much, and by the uniformity of the narrative I converted the fable into truth in the minds of my hearers."

How vividly this reminds one of his mysterious conduct to Eckermann with regard to some portions of the second

part of 'Faust.' In that dark composition Faust asks Mephistopheles to show him Helena; and Mephistopheles tells him it can only be managed by application "to goddesses who live sublime in loneliness, but not in space, still less in time—of whom to speak is embarassment"—'the mothers;' 'a glowing tripod'[5] is to assure him that he has attained the deepest point of all, and by its shining he is to see the mothers. But there is *no way* there, as there *can* be no way into the "untrodden and untreadable," where he is to be surrounded by "loneliness." On hearing the 'mothers' mentioned, Faust starts back shuddering; and when asked why, only replies,—

> "Die Mütter! Mütter! 's klingt so wunderlich."
> (The mothers! mothers! it has the strangest ring.)

Poor Eckermann had been set to read this remarkable scene, and was, naturally, a good deal puzzled. But he shall tell his own story.

"This afternoon Goethe did me the great pleasure of reading those scenes in which Faust visits the mothers. The novelty and unexpectedness of this subject, with his manner of reading the scene, struck me so forcibly, that I felt myself translated into the situation of Faust, shuddering at the communication from Mephistopheles. Although I had heard and felt the whole, yet so much remained an enigma to me, that I felt myself compelled to ask Goethe for some

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[5] The passage is, it seems to me, a satire upon the Hegelian practice of deducing every thing out of "the pure nothing," by what may be called the tripartite cork-screw philosophy, which does every thing in logical triplets, but winds itself a little higher at each repetition.

explanation. But he, in his usual manner, wrapped himself up in mystery, looking on me with wide open eyes, and repeating the words,—

'*Die Mütter! Mütter! 's klingt so wunderlich.*'

"'I can betray to you no more, except that I found in Plutarch that in ancient Greece the mothers were spoken of as divinities. This is all for which I am indebted to tradition; the rest is my own invention. Take the manuscript home with you, study it carefully, and see to what conclusion you come.'"

The good childlike Eckermann conscientiously tasked himself to find the riddle out quite as anxiously as Goethe's boy-audience did about the door in the old wall; perhaps it was even less worth while. He elaborated a most complex and difficult 'view' on the subject of these mothers; but Goethe let nothing further transpire. Indeed it might fairly wait at least till the nut-trees, the fountain, and the tablet in the old Frankfort wall, had drawn together again.

There is one other slight incident of his boyhood so characteristic of the man that it is worth mentioning. The calm, unabashed, self-fortified boy appears in it the very image of the man. Coming out of the theatre, he remarked ponderingly to a companion, with reference to one of the young actors, "How handsomely the boy was dressed, and how well he looked! Who knows in how tattered a jacket he may sleep to-night!" The mother of the lad, happening to be beside him in the crowd, took great umbrage, and read Goethe a long lecture. "As I could neither excuse myself nor escape from her, I was really embarrassed; and when she paused for a

moment, said, without thinking, 'Well, why do you make such a noise about it?—to-day red, to-morrow dead.'[6] These words seemed to strike the woman dumb. She stared at me, and moved away from me as soon as it was in any degree possible." This was not meant to give pain; it was only that Goethe habitually cut short what annoyed him, without caring much how. He had the nerve and the presence of mind, and of other consequences he thought little. There is a like tale, referring to later years, of a fanatical admirer bursting into the bedroom of an inn where Goethe was undressing, and throwing himself ecstatically at his feet, pouring forth at the same time a set speech of adoration. Goethe blew out the candle and jumped into bed. This was truly a great inspiration;[7] but the power of calmly warding off anything that did not suit him was exercised quite without reference to the moral elements of the case. Goethe had at every period of his life a thoroughly kindly nature; but one, as it seems to me, quite unvisited by any devoted affection. The conception of really living for another probably never occurred to him. His attachments to women were numerous and violent, never self-devoting. For his mother and sister he clearly felt warmly, but certainly he was neither a fond brother nor a fond son. After his transition to Weimar, he visited his mother only at very long intervals, and never seems

[6] "Heute roth, morgen todt."—a German proverb.

[7] I do not know the authority for this anecdote of Goethe. Mr. Emerson used to narrate it, not without keen sympathy for the oppressed lion.

to have hastened to her side in any time of special trouble, though he always rejoiced to see her and wished to have her with him. In the last eleven years of her old age he never once visited Frankfort, his summer holiday always taking him in another direction—to Karlsbad or Marienbad. And his letters were too few to keep her well informed even of his more important movements. He was, in short, a kind and hearty, rather than a deeply-attached brother and son. If he never gave himself up to an affection, he never demanded or even expected it from another. Never was there a less jealous or exacting man. He seldom interfered with his own calm process of self-culture for the sake of another. He never expected another to do it for him. And if this remark properly belongs to a later period of his life, yet the genial but pliant and self-considering nature of his relation to others is distinctly visible in his childhood. He was already beginning to accommodate himself to all inevitabilities, and to ward off, wherever possible, all that was foreign to his nature. The extent of his boyish studies was not less wide than that of his boyish experience of life. To Latin, Greek, Italian, German, English, and Hebrew, together with drawing, music, geography, and Roman law, he had given much time, and apparently made considerable progress in them before he went to college at sixteen. He scattered his studies, and had 'alternate fits' of Hebrew and drawing, &c.; but his retentive memory did not easily lose what it had once laid hold of.

In 1764 Goethe began that habit of falling in love, of which he never broke himself for the next sixty years. Mr. Lewes makes light of his love for Gretchen, and the scholiasts seem never to have traced her history. But boyish as his passion was, the separation clearly caused him no less intense a suffering, and a more inconsolable despair, than any subsequent adoration. His mind had not yet got the strength to carry him through. His nature was still the dependent nature of a home-bred boy. He had as yet no intellectual passions, no penetrating consciousness of creative power. It is clear that this kind, sisterly Gretchen, was still living in his imagination when he imortalised her name in 'Faust.'

The night of Joseph II.'s coronation, when he forgot his secret door-key, by means of which, through his mother's connivance, he used to enter long after his father had supposed him to be in bed, was the last of his childhood. With his separation from Gretchen there came upon him the moody humours, the dark sentimental infinitudes, the confusion of energies, the thankless melancholies and boisterous caprices peculiar to that period of life when young men are most agreeable to themselves and most oppressive to mankind. The passion for Gretchen had involved him with a set not quite harmless. And the stiff dignity of his father was sadly wounded by having his son's name mixed innocently up in cases of swindling, and even forgery. He was subjected to the companionship of an accommodating tutor; and a year later, in the

autumn of 1765, went forth to see the world as a student of the University of Leipzig.

Most poets' youth is turbid, and apt to be egotistical. Goethe's is not an exception. He seems to have had generally, when in good health, buoyant spirits. But the spiritual abysses are of course unfathomable. Mr. Lewes has given some very interesting letters concerning Goethe at this time from his college friends. At Leipzig Goethe got a good deal of knowledge without much diligence, and also fell into dissipation. The only pure influence over him that he felt powerful was that of Gellert, the professor of *belles-lettres*, and one lady friend, the wife of a law professor. The latter died during his studentship. Gellert's mild influence he felt painful and a reproach to him, and he began to avoid it. Perhaps it was not very wisely exerted. He used, says Goethe, "to hold his head down, and ask us with his weeping, winning voice, whether we went regularly to church, who was our confessor, and whether we attended the holy communion. If we passed this examination but ill, we were dismissed with lamentations, we were more annoyed than edified; and yet we could not help loving the man heartily." Goethe's law-lectures were rather jokes. He naturally preferred drawing caricatures of the official persons in their official costume, to taking notes. Fritters (very good ones), hot from the fire, came into competition with one of these classes, and were considered the more attractive. Goethe fell deeply in love again at Leipzig; but he quarrelled with the young

lady, and he seems to say the despair he felt at her loss was the impulse which plunged him into dissipation. This affection was the origin of his little pastoral piece, 'The Lover's Humours,' which certainly gives promise of his future power. Besides containing some fine lines, and one fair living character in profile, it shows that rich fertility of ordinary feeling and harmonious sentiment which must flow on long in order to temper the mind to the higher creative mood. A poet who, like Gray, for instance, has no *flow* of level feeling, loses the predisposing influences from which the deeper, truer insight can alone come. When the poet has reached, as it were, the ordinary level of genial human emotion, then, and not sooner, do his special characteristics begin to work with effect. If he is not in the first place luxuriant in common feeling, he loses all the advantage of his higher faculties. Goethe, like all great poets, was most luxuriant in common thought and feeling; and when once fairly afloat in that, his genius began to work. The 'Fellow-Sinners,' which he also wrote at this same time, has equal ease, but not equal warmth, with the piece just mentioned, and consequently very little trace of his characteristic power. From Leipzig Goethe went home ill, after three years' residence, in 1768. His father was irritated by his delicate health, and still more by anything like hypochondriacal conversation. His mother and sister paid him, as is usual in such cases, something like divine honours. They were moped, and delighted to have an invalid to worship. He looked into alchemy, and began to think of Faust.

In the spring of 1770 he went to the University of Strasburg, where he fell in with Herder, who first introduced him to 'The Vicar of Wakefield,' the loose awkward machinery of which Goethe (who never had any power of constructing a plot) afterwards partly borrowed in his novel of 'Wilhelm Meister.' The exquisite humour, and childlike simplicity of taste in that book, are Goldsmith's own. But in the style of representing nature and life Goethe is not at all unlike Goldsmith. Like him, he does not impartially paint, but rather vaguely indicates the principal influences of the scene before him. He sketches no outlined picture, at least of *men*—but gives one or two figures, hovering too close to the eye to be caught completely in any one glance, and which are presented therefore, in minute yet very significant successive details, to the closest conceivable scrutiny; and for the rest, he indicates only the most important inlets of accessory influence in a few words of loose spacious suggestion. As Goldsmith presents Dr. Primrose and his wife by such minute successive touches, that not till you fall back from the story can you see them as a whole, and represents the daughters only by the general streams of influence they diffuse, the rosy and violet light their characters respectively reflect, in the vaguer distance, adding, too, those influences of external nature which most beset the senses, but no clear landscape,—so also Goethe painted in his three novels, 'Werther,' 'Meister,' and finally, though with more distinctive outline, and less attempt at indicating a whole character or a whole

landscape by isolated samples, in the 'Elective Affinities.' We do not wonder that he told Eckermann, in later years, that he found in Sir Walter Scott the suggestion of a wholly new school of art. That writer's strong, masterly, often hard outlines, present the most vivid possible contrast to the faint fringes of that luminous *nimbus* which usually involves his own most carefully finished figures.

While at Strasburg, Goethe made the acquaintance of the family which seemed to him the counterpart of Dr. Primrose's, and in which he appeared first in the character of Mr. Burchell; exchanging it, however, not for Sir William Thornhill's, but for his own. Pastor Brion had a little parsonage at Drusenheim, sixteen miles north of Strasburg, into which Goethe was introduced, in the disguise of a poor and dilapidated theological student, by a fellow-student. The latter was attached (or becoming so) to the eldest and most lively daughter, whom Goethe identified as the Olivia of Goldsmith's tale. The second daughter, Frederika, who took benign pity on the shabby theologian, and captivated his fancy by her simplicity and grace, reminded him of Sophia; but she little knew that instead of giving rise to a novel, she was starting a new epoch in German criticism, and spinning the first thread of a very ponderous "Frederike litteratur," in which an erudition as yet unborn would discuss, with prodigious learning and subtlety, after collation of MS. letters, personal examination of the place, and cross-questioning of aged survivors, the precise point

where Goethe had crossed the Sesenheim road, the position of Frederika's own arbour, the date of the first kisses she bestowed, and many other matters of equal weight. To have spurred on heavy-armed German commentators (of the class who discuss a lost iota in fragments of Greek plays) into a cumbrous canter of exegetical sympathy with a little affair of the heart, must have been about as far removed from Frederika's presentiments, as this apparatus criticus is from the light air of the life it "expounds." Imagine an Anthon's "edition of Tennyson's 'Miller's Daughter,' with critical notes," and you have a faint picture of the "Frederike litteratur."[8] Goethe acted his part skilfully, and promised to "supply" occasionally for the pastor on week-day occasions. But, disgusted with his shabby appearance, he fled the next day, only to change one disguise for another. He came back as the innkeeper's boy, with a "christening-cake" and an Alsatian *patois;* and when this disguise was penetrated, he took his own character, and began seriously to fall in love. The visit was often repeated, and Frederika's heart completely gained. Goethe now became uneasy. The presence of Frederika pained him, though he "knew of nothing more pleasant than to think of her

[8] There is a profoundly learned controversy, for example, as to whether one of Goethe's letters to a friend at this time was or was not written on the piece of blue paper in which some comfits, &c., had been sent to him from Strasburg. The question turns, to a considerable extent, on whether he gave the paper-bag with the comfits to the young ladies, or only the comfits out of it. It is discussed with laborious good faith.

while absent." He had to free himself from this influence, which threatened to introduce something foreign to his natural development. He was leaving Strasburg, and once more he visited the "golden children" at Sesenheim, where he found a gray desolate mist settling down over the little parsonage, instead of the fresh buoyant air of days gone by. "I reached her (Frederika) my hand from my horse; the tears stood in her eyes, and I felt very uneasy." He felt more than uneasy. These words copy only the blanched picture that remained in the old man's memory. Frederika fell ill; and Goethe, on his return to Frankfort living in bitter suspense as to the effect on her peace, and yet knowing that he could not comfort her without transforming himself and exchanging a quiet sentiment for real self-devotion of spirit, became restless and miserable. That his final decision was wrong is far from clear. The thought of devoting himself to her gave him no joy, but seemed to weigh him down. Yet it seems clear that the reason lay, not in the absence of any thing which any other attachment ever gave, but in the reluctance which was now beginning to creep upon him to devote himself and his inward life to any thing outside of himself. The idea of self-development, self-idealisation, as the only scope of his conscious life, was beginning to fascinate him, and to gnaw at the roots of his nature. If he could by one generous act of self-forgetfulness have devoted himself to secure Frederika's happiness, there seems some probability that he would have secured a far

happier and clearer life for himself also. It was perhaps, less the want of love,—for he never seems to have felt more love,—which prevented this, than the want of strength to cast away the miserable dream of keeping the course of his inward development free from all foreign interference. It was much later than this—when the self-idealising vein had become more prominent—that he wrote to Lavater: "The desire to raise the pyramid of my existence—the base of which is already laid—as high as possible in the air absorbs every other desire, and scarcely ever quits me;"[9] but the poison was already working in him. Goethe never became a selfish man in the coarse sense of the term. He always cultivated benignant unselfish sympathies as the most graceful elements in this same fancy-pyramid of his existence. He was generous by nature, and would give up, from kindly feeling, any thing that was not of the essence of himself. But it soon became his habit to cultivate disinterested affection only as a subordinate element, needful to the harmony of a universally experienced nature. To have loved the goodness of either God or man more devotedly than he loved its reflex image in his own character, would have done him more good than all the sickly pottering with the "pyramid of his existence" with which he was so much occupied.

It would be absurd to say all this about Goethe's youthful conduct to Frederika, were it not the type of

[9] Lewes's 'Life of Goethe,' vol. ii. chap. i.

what was always happening in his after-life when he knew by experience that he very much preferred to be passively hampered by a wounded heart, to being actively hampered by an affectionate wife. The essence of these tedious tortures was almost always the same. He wished for love with limited liability; he did not wish to devote *himself* to any one except himself. This "limited liability" did not so well meet the views of the young ladies[1] themselves, who were sometimes, to his infinite embarrassment, willing even to "go to America" with him, or any where else. This was meeting him a great deal more than half-way. He could not, of course, avail himself of the sacrifice.

Goethe returned to Frankfort, bringing with him a little harper-lad whom he had picked up at Mannheim, and with thoughtless kindness promised to befriend. His mother, at first much perplexed, found the boy lodging and employment out of the house. 'Götz von Berlichingen' was now in Goethe's mind, and, spurred on by his sister's incredulity as to his literary perseverance, he completed it in its first form in six weeks.

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[1] A distinct classification of Goethe's loves has not yet been added by the critics to the "chronology of the original" of his writings. It would be a material help to head the different years with the name or names of the ascendant star, and some indication of its apparent brightness. There were about eight A 1's, "heiss und leidenschaftlich geliebte," &c.; five, at least, Æ 1's, with whom he stood "im innigsten Verhältniss der Liebe;" and, finally, a great number of "holde Wesen," some of them already obscured by shadows of time, who were recipients of a more transient adoration.

To me it seems far the most noble as well as the most powerful of Goethe's dramas. I agree with Mr. Lewes, that in its first shape there are many fine elements which are lost in the later and revised edition. No doubt something is cut away that needed cutting away, and more appearance of unity is given by the condensation of Adelheid's episode. But this is the part on which Goethe's imagination had really worked with finest effect, and the gain to unity is a loss to poetry. It is the only great production of Goethe's in which a really noble, self-forgetful *man* stands out in the foreground to give us a moral standard by which to measure the meaner characters. It is the only great production in which awful shadows of remorse haunt the selfish and the guilty. One reads in it that Goethe's mind had as yet by no means finally embraced the calm self-culture view of life—the view which looked upon women's devotion, human life, indeed the whole universe itself, mainly as artistic material to be assimilated by the individual constitution, and at as little cost to the digestive system as that constitution would allow. Fascinating as *Egmont* is, Egmont himself is the later Goethe, the conscious master-builder condescending to accept from woman, and man, and God, materials for his "pyramid of existence." Götz is a very different figure; and among all Goethe's masculine creations he stands alone,—the only one who did not *use* the world, but *served* it. The play (in its early form) will be thought gross; but it has little of that tainting impurity which

turns a microscope full upon the subtler workings of physical passion, to the great disfigurement of some of his later works. In another respect Götz is exceptional. It is curious that Adelheid in 'Götz von Berlichingen' is the only feminine character of the proud passionate class that Goethe ever drew; and that Maria, much more like his other characters in type, is about the faintest and poorest of them. With all his unmistakable wealth and inimitable grace in producing women's characters, each as distinct from the other as Adelheid is from Maria, they are all, Adelheid only excepted, of the dependent, tender, worshipping class. Mr. Thackeray's Beatrice, in 'Esmond,' is less completely exceptional in his writings than Adelheid is in Goethe's. Thackeray and Goethe are alike in this, as in some other respects—both of them have drawn women as living as Shakespeare's. And all three, by one consent, are disposed to make their powerful queen-like women bad. No doubt this is according to nature; but Sir Walter Scott must have seen the exceptions, for his finest female characters (Rebecca, Flora, Die Vernon, &c.) are certainly of the queenly class. Goethe's predilections are explained by the fact that he painted, for the most part, the women who worshipped him, and it may be that he punished Adelheid for not being one of them by robing her in passion and in crime. She is the only woman in his works of whom we find no autobiographical trace.

In 1772 Goethe went to Wetzlar, ostensibly to watch

chancery suits; and there culled some poignant experiences for his next work, 'Werther.' This he did not write, however, till 1774. The remarkable contrast, both in substance and form, between 'Götz' and 'Werther'—written within three years of each other—gives, however, some insight into Goethe's dramatic power and want of power. I find it asserted on all hands—Mr. Lewes vehemently concurring—that a poet must be a greater artist for entirely ignoring all moral partialities, and, as they say, picturing life as it is, not as it ought to be. There is a sense in which it is true (for instance, it is a valuable criticism on Edgeworthian art): but the sense in which it is put forward as a defence of the utter want of moral perspective in most of Goethe's productions is certainly not that sense. Compare, for instance, 'Götz von Berlichingen' with 'Werther,' 'Wilhelm Meister,' the 'Elective Affinities,' 'Egmont,' and even 'Faust.' In the first there is as much moral evil as any appetite, however eager for "things as they are," could wish; but it is thrown into its right relative place by the appearance in the foreground of two noble and simple characters—Götz and Elizabeth—by which all the others are naturally measured. Shadows are shadows, and light is light. In 'Werther' the moral evil introduced is far less—is, indeed, of a quiet, subtle, sentimental kind—the mere heart-eating rust and destructiveness of unmeasured self-indulgence; but there is nothing noble to contrast with it—nothing but the cold external phantom Albert, and the floating image of Charlotte

reflected in such a mist of Wertherism that it has no distinctness at all. What is the mere artistic effect on the reader's mind? Almost universally this, that the picture, powerful as it is, misses its effect from the absence of any fine moral contrasts by which to measure it. It is like the picture of a mist seen from inside. Nothing adds more to the beauty of a landscape than vapours rising round a mountain's brow; but then you must stand out of the fog, and see the dark bold ridges round which the vapours climb. In 'Werther' are painted wreath upon wreath of emotion, of blinding doubts and shapeless passions; no speck of firm land anywhere. This will probably be conceded of 'Werther;' but the moral part of the criticism applies equally to Goethe's other works. We believe the extraordinary want of outline in his characters to be greatly due to this entire absence of any attempt at moral proportion in all his later works. Werther is made, in one letter, to say most characteristically, "I scarce know how to express myself, —my power of representing things is so weak,—every thing swims and wavers so before my mind, that I *can catch no outline;* but I fancy somehow that, if I had clay or wax, I could succeed in modelling. If it lasts longer, I shall get some clay, and begin kneading, even though it be only cakes after all." Werther's mind is so dissolved, that he can only feel and grope his way in the dark, as it were, to grace of form. This weakness is partly the expression of an artistic difficulty Goethe really felt in grasping in one glance any extensive outline

of thought,—a difficulty due to the microscopic nature of his insight, which only travelled very slowly over a large surface of life: he often modelled his groups figure by figure; the outline of the whole grew up as he felt his way to it. But a part reason of this was, that he had no moral graduation for his groups,—no natural admirations which gave a unity to the whole and determined the line of the shadows. Outline is a result of comparison, — moral outline of moral comparison. You cannot compare without an implied standard. The heroes in 'Werther,' 'Wilhelm Meister,' 'Tasso,' 'Faust,' are such cloudy, shadowy pictures, because they are essentially sketches of moral weakness without any relief in characters of corresponding power. Albert, Jarno, Antonio, are *not* foils to them—they have not the force which the others want, but are simply deficient in the moral qualities which make the former characters problems of some interest. Certainly, the former are soft, the latter hard. But the second set do not give strength as opposed to weakness, but rigidity as opposed to weakness.[2] What is wanted all along is some dim pic-

[2] Goethe well knew, in physical nature, that soft things should not be contrasted with hard, but with firm. He had (I am not speaking ironically) an exquisitely fine sympathy with vegetable life. Consider this picture of a fruit-basket in 'Alexis and Dora' (I quote the graceful version given among the 'English Hexameter Translations' published by Mr. Murray in 1847):—

> "Silently thou arrayest the fruit in the comeliest order,
> Laying the heavier gold-ball of the orange beneath;
> Next the soft-pulpt figs, that the slightest pressure disfigures;
> Lastly, the myrtle at top roofing the whole with its green.'

If, instead of the orange, Dora had laid a cocoa-nut under the figs,

ture in the minds of Werther, Meister, Tasso, and Faust, of what they *would* be,—what it is which would lift them out of the imbecility of their purposeless career. This is the element never supplied. We are presented with a set of contradictions instead of contrasts. Only in Götz is there any picture of strength without hardness; only in Weislingen is there a picture of fatal irresolution that has a real vision of the career by which he might have been saved. The *moral* outline which Goethe's youthful remorse put into this picture has raised it, considered merely as a work of art, in many respects high above its fellows. So far from the truth is it that the poet must have no moral predilections at heart, that if he has none such, his picture becomes feeble, watery, wavering. Impartiality in delineation, not impartiality in conception, is what is needed. Shakespeare frequently gives no foil to the character whose weakness he is delineating; but he always gives it some clear vision of the nobleness and the strength above it. Hamlet knows what he could do, and dare not. Lady Macbeth knows what she should do, and will not. Antony knows what he would do, and cannot. But Faust has no glimmering of salvation; Werther has no gleam of what he might be; Wilhelm is a milksop *pur et simple;* and Tasso's character is then, and then only, a fine picture if it be granted that he is supposed insane. It seems to me that no more remarkable breakdown of the theory of the "moral indifference"

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she would never have made such an impression on the yielding heart of Alexis.

of art can be suggested than Goethe's writings. His poetry is perfect until it rises to the dramatic region, where moral actions are involved, and a moral faith therefore needed, and then it becomes blank, shadowy, feeble. 'Wilhelm Meister' would not have been "a menagerie of tame animals," as Niebuhr called it with great truth, if Goethe had not lost the (never strong) moral predilections of younger days, but had purified his eye and heart for their insight into human weakness by reverent study of nobler strength.

Another criticism which has a real connection with that just made is suggested by the comparison of 'Werther' and 'Götz.' Mr. Lewes truly says, that Goethe never gives enough importance to the action, the progress of events. He does not develop the characters essentially *through* the action, but on occasion of the action. You do not feel that Götz has *come in* from that last scene; it is too much a series of pictures, like Hogarth's pictorial biographies; the art is much greater, no doubt, if you take them in succession; but the breath of the past has not passed into the present scene, each is almost intelligible in separation. A very great part of the skill in 'Werther' consists in the gradual rise of the excitement,—the stages of passion;—still it is a series of pictures; there is nothing to oblige you to look back to the past and forward to the future. It might begin almost anywhere, and stop almost anywhere, and be intelligible still as a delineation of character. This is so also in 'Egmont.' It is less so in 'Götz von Berlichingen,'

though it is too much so there, than in any other work. The past action is much more worked into the essence of the following scenes than is the case of 'Egmont,' 'Meister,' 'Iphigenia,' 'Tasso,' or 'Faust.' And the obvious reason is, that the actors have *moral* characters, and so the sense of what they had done or not done hangs upon them throughout; they do not turn up as complete in relation to each distinct scene as if they had had no previous life: they have a sense of the past, a presentiment of the future. The presence of an implicit moral estimate of the characters does not only help art by adding outline; for moral responsibility forges many a strong link between the past, present, and future, which is otherwise wanting. Is it not, indeed, the strongest of all links between the past and the future in actual life? Werther's uneasiness grows organically; but it grows as a tree puts out its branches, without memory or reference to its past stages. Egmont does not grow at all. Faust does not grow, Tasso undergoes changes; but only those of a sensitive-plant, drawing in with every touch, expanding at every sunbeam. All Goethe's feminine creations grow; but usually it is the growth of affection only. The only portions of a coherent drama that Goethe ever wrote are the Gretchen elements in 'Faust.' That is the highest drama in every sense, and one of the most essential elements in it is a deep and true remorse.

After his return from Wetzlar, and publication of 'Götz' and 'Werther,' Goethe became a famous man

The effect of this fame upon himself was certainly very great. Not only are the letters to Kestner clearly written under great excitement after the publication, but other correspondences which he then began are far more dizzy than 'Werther' itself. His letters to the Countess von Stolberg are mostly mystical emotional quavers. This young lady he never saw. They struck up an inarticulate attachment on the strength of 'Werther.' Goethe rushed into a correspondence with her of this description: "My dear one,—I will call you by no name; —for what are the names—friend, sister, lover, bride, wife, or even a word that expresses a union of all these names,—compared with the very feeling itself to which —I can write no more; your letter has come upon me at a strange moment.—Adieu—(written at) the very first moment."[3] And some of these remarkable letters are more incoherent still. So greatly did Goethe err in afterwards representing 'Werther' as setting his mind free from the fever of sentimentalism, that not till after its publication did he fully succumb to it.

Introduced by his celebrity as a writer to many eminent men, Goethe began to see and to study a far wider and more various field of social life than he ever attempted to delineate. It might be matter of surprise, that in so freely-moving a plot as that of 'Wilhelm Meister' Goethe should not have anticipated the easy

[3] Quoted by Düntzer in his 'Frauenbilder aus Goethe's Leben,' p. 271.

sketches of character which Dickens and Thackeray have made so popular, and thus effectively used his large experience of social life;—for he never willingly let a grain of real experience go unused. The reason obviously is, that he had so little of the humour which makes sketches of *superficial* life and manners living and agreeable. His remarks on common men and manners and on uncommon men and manners are always subtle, often amusing; but you need to have his personal comments to give his descriptions of these trivial matters any interest; he has not the art of making his characters speak so as to explain their own folly; he cannot give just that touch of caricature by which Dickens effected this; he cannot introduce that background of fine irony by which Thackeray turned men into critics of themselves. He understood every-day German life as well as either Dickens or Thackeray understood every-day English life. Nothing could be much more skilful than his accounts, for instance, of the prophetic Lavater (whom Mr. Lewes most uncharitably and untruly terms a "born hypocrite," quite in contradiction to Goethe's latest and maturest estimate), and of Basedow the educational reformer,—the one a man of real power, spoiled by being a lady's preacher and by the needful devices for keeping up popularity which this involved;—the other a coarse, self-indulgent, unscrupulous, and exceedingly dirty philanthropist, who characteristically enough had the greatest horror of baptism.[4] The only element

[4] Schlosser, in his 'History of the Eighteenth Century,' tells us

wanting in Goethe's descriptions is, not a perception of that in them which is to us ridiculous, but a thorough perception and enjoyment of the ridiculous part. He can see a full-blown absurdity, but not the delicate transition by which real life passes into unreality. His 'Plundersweilern Fair,' and other things of that description written at this time, and his subsequent comic works (such at least as I know), of which Mr. Lewes thinks the 'Triumph of Susceptibility' a fair specimen, are mere farces,—laughable on the stage, perhaps, but tiresome to read. 'Bombastes Furioso' gives a good idea of this kind of production, but seems to me more amusing. It is strange that so great a poet had not a quicker eye for the boundary-line between reality and unreality, between things and words; he was never quite out of danger of mistaking sham-pathos for true; he had never the eye of a great humorist for the subtle distinction between the ring of hollow and of solid metal in others, not always even in himself. A thin vein of genuine trash may be traced both in his compositions and his personal life,—a kind of inanity to which indeed all men are subject, but which a man with real humour would immediately have detected

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that Basedow had a long dispute with his wife and the clergyman, in which both of them used all possible arguments and entreaties to induce him to give up the notion of having his daughter baptised "Prænumerantia Elementaria Philanthropia," partly, I suppose, in ridicule of the ceremony, and partly as a puff of his Philanthropic Academy at Dessau.

in himself and suppressed on the spot. I may take as instances the execrable sentimental device of giving an artificial appearance of life to Mignon's corpse, in the last part of 'Wilhelm Meister' (against which Schiller meekly but hesitatingly protested),—or, in actual life, the ponderous sentimentality that induced Goethe, at the mature age of thirty-three, being seized with a taste for inscriptions, actually to engrave on a big stone in his garden at Weimar some lines beginning, "Here the lover has mused in silence on his beloved;" nor does it appear that he ever suffered from nausea on beholding it. This sort of unreality was in the atmosphere, no doubt; but Goethe was proof against so much malaria that was also in the atmosphere, that it is worthy of notice—especially in connection with the little artistic use he made of his wide experience of contemporary manners—that he was not able to keep himself completely free from *this*. His observations on society, which were very acute and rich and various, he threw into the form of epigrammatic maxims, and stowed them away in every gap and corner—suitable or unsuitable—of his many works. He used them but very little—owing, I think, to the unfitness for successful manners-painting I have just indicated—in the really concrete delineation of the times he lived in and the society he had himself observed.

Soon after Goethe's literary fame was established, in the Christmas of the year 1774, he was introduced to Anna Elizabeth Schönemann, whose mother, the widow of a

rich Frankfort banker, was one of the very few who at that time ever thought of assembling fashionable society in their houses so often as every evening in the season. To this young lady, so familiar in Goethe's writings as Lili, the poet now transferred his affections. His father and mother had been anxious that he should marry a quiet girl in their own circle, to whom he had been thrice assigned by a marriage-lottery in the picnics of the previous year—Anna Sibylla Münch—but he regarded this parental view as one in which it was impossible to concur, although in the mean time he was quite ready to be affectionate. To Lili, on the other hand, he was really warmly attached, and for a time betrothed; but neither his father's pride nor his own found it easy to bear the reluctance felt towards the engagement by Lili's friends, who knew that Goethe had neither that amount of money nor of prestige to offer, for which, as it is said, not only the family, but the bank itself, had a craving. Poetry was no object. Goethe wrote many of his most exquisite lyrics under the inspiration of this attachment, sending them simultaneously to the young lady and to the newspaper.[5] It is curious to note how all Goethe's finest lyrics cluster round his attachments. Few things

[5] The lovely song, "Warum ziehst du mich unwiderstehlich," was, as Düntzer has ascertained, composed in March, 1775, and sent to Jacobi for insertion in the 'Iris' at the same time. So of other songs. Of course names were not given; but the entire absence of any reserve in the sentimental life of that period is very curious.

else seem ever to waken in him the same tones of unconscious airy melody. His other poetry, often exquisitely fine, has the polish of high art upon it,—but his lyrics seem to escape as unconsciously from the essence of the earth and air as the scent from a violet, or the music from a bird. Some of Goethe's finest lyrics sprang up at Leipzig under the genial influence of Käthchen Schönkopf; others, but scarcely of equal loveliness, owe their origin to Frederika; the third, and as yet the richest group, belong to Lili; but curiously enough, the richest cluster, I think, of all,—that which most resembles a lapful of fresh wildflowers,—was written in 1803, when Goethe was fifty-four years old, and is due, we imagine (from what Mr. Lewes tells us concerning the origin of the 'Elective Affinities'), as well as the sonnets written two or three years later, to Minna Herzlieb, the ward of the Jena bookseller. The engaged or married ladies he adored appear to have had a more prosaic influence upon him.

But to return to Lili. After a good deal of torture, due to the elder representatives of both families, a worthy Fräulein Delf, much given to mediation, procured a tacit consent of the parents on both sides, and Goethe was engaged to Lili. This seems to have on the whole made him unhappy. His sister, who was married and at a distance, took a strong view against the match, and wrote letters about it; the old Rath, she thought, would never so accommodate himself to the arrangement as to make Lili happy; Goethe would be obliged still

to live with his father and mother, as the custom was, and a young lady of family and wealth would put the former out. In short, his sister was sure that for *Lili's sake*, he ought to break off the engagement, intimating, in fact, as Goethe implies, that she found her own husband but dull company, and that Goethe could never make up to Lili for the splendour she would resign. So, after some agonies, he suddenly departed for Switzerland with the two Counts von Stolberg, on a probationary absence, only hinting to Lili that he was going, for he could not bear to take leave. It appears to have been his intention, if he could have persuaded himself to endure the pain, to break off the engagement by going on into Italy; if not, as proved to be the case, to return and see what fate should give. It is not easy to imagine, from the style of Goethe's narrative, that all this effort was made for Lili's sake. He admits that she never hazarded a doubt of her own happiness, and was willing to follow him even to America; a solution which distressed her lover extremely. "My father's good house, but a few hundred yards from her own, was at all events a more tolerable condition to take up with than distant uncertain possibilities beyond the sea." They were actually engaged at this time; and it does not seem very generous in Goethe to have left Lili without explanation to fight his battles for him with her reluctant friends, in order to try experiments on his own fortitude.

This flight into Switzerland, while pursued by Lili's image, gave rise to one or two of his loveliest lyrics.

As the heavy white masses of the distant Alps rose up in the early dawn, at the foot of the broad lake of Zürich, bordered by gently sloping cornfield banks, he composed the lovely little poem of which I have attempted to produce an English version. Goethe was at the time debating in his mind his future relation to Lili. I must premise, with Mr. Lewes, that Goethe is untranslatable. Some dim vision of the beauty of the poem may, however, glimmer through the following semi-transparent medium :—

I draw new milk of life, fresh blood,
From the free universe,—
Ah, Nature, it is all too good
Upon thy breast, kind nurse !
Waves rock our boat in equal time
With the clear-plashing oar,
And cloudy Alps with head sublime
Confront us from the shore.

Eyes, have ye forgot your yearning ?
Golden dreams, are ye returning !
Gold as ye are, O, stay above !
Here too is life—here too is love.

Hosts of stars are blinking
In the lake's crystal cup,
Flowing mists are drinking
The tow'ring distance up.
Morning winds are skimming
Round the deep-shadowed bay,
In its clear mirror swimming
The ripening harvests play.

On the summit of the St. Gothard Goethe felt that his German home and love behind him were sweeter

than all the wide warm loveliness into which the bright Ticino rushed eagerly before his eyes; and he returned, with hesitation in his heart, to Frankfort. Lili, naturally hurt at his unexplained absence, was soon as affectionate as ever, and the poet as happy; but it did not last long. The hurt pride at feeling himself rather tolerated than welcomed by her friends, and the dread of domestic fetters, returned. Gradually he broke the chain, and strove to flirt with other young ladies; but he was miserable. In this state he began 'Egmont.'

An invitation to visit the young Duke of Weimar was now very welcome to him. His father opposed his going, thinking it would place him in a dependent position. Moreover, the Weimar friend in whose company he had been invited to make the journey never appeared, and his father treated the mistake as an intentional slight. But Goethe's portmanteau was ready packed, his mind set upon change. His father proposed to give him money for an Italian journey. Goethe consented to go by Heidelberg and the Tyrol to Italy, if in Heidelberg he found no trace of the missing Weimar escort. There lived Fräulein Delf, the mediating lady who had in vain secured the consent of the reluctant parents to his engagement with Lili. Her head was now busy with mediating a substitute scheme. She hoped to marry him to a lady at the Mannheim Court, and connect him permanently with it after his return from Italy. A courier came from Frankfort in the middle of the night to announce the arrival of the Weimar friend and to recal Goethe imme-

diately. Fräulein Delf gave vehement counsel, urging him to decline, and go on into Italy. Goethe was in favour of Weimar, and ordered the postchaise. Long he disputed by candlelight with this lady, while an impatient postilion fidgeted about. At length Goethe tore himself away, apostrophising his astonished friend in the words of Egmont: "Child, child no more. Lashed as by invisible spirits, the sun-steeds of time whirl on the light car of our destiny; and for us it only remains in calm self-possession to hold fast the reins, and here to the right, there to the left,—here from a rock, there from a precipice,—to direct the wheels. Whither we are going who can tell? Scarcely can we remember whence we came." The "sun-steeds of time," with the aid of the visible postilion, took him safely to Weimar. Goethe, reluctant to talk of Providence, intimates, however, that this epoch in his life *was* providential, and that the "dæmonic" element to which a man ought to concede "no more than is fitting" was represented by his father, his own impatience, and good Fräulein Delf,—all eager to shatter his Weimar prospects. I am not at all sure that the reverse was not true—that the young Duke of Weimar may not have been the "dæmonic" element at this crisis, while the elderly lady may have spoken the voice of higher warning,—if not in her match-making views, at least so far as she resisted the attraction to Weimar. Goethe had now reached the maturity of his powers, and henceforth we shall find his character more distinctly written in his works than in the monotonous incidents of his external life.

There is no part of Mr. Lewes's book which is more interesting and picturesque than the delineation of the Weimar localities and the new life the poet led. He has himself visited the place, and surveyed every thing with a quick and thoughtful eye. The garden-house on the banks of the Ilm—the larger house to which Goethe removed in the town—the open-air theatricals at Ettersburg—and the life of the Court, are all gracefully and vividly sketched. Far from convincing me, however, that the new life had no injurious effect on Goethe's mind, even Mr. Lewes's apologetic narrative strengthens a strong impression in the other direction. That it made Goethe into a "servile courtier," no one with the faintest insight into the man could for a moment dream. Karl August, the young Duke of Weimar, was a lad of nineteen years—eight years younger than the poet; and though possessed of a strong will and a certain personal fascination, Goethe was far too conscious of his own superiority of mind to become a courtier, had even his temperament allowed it. But it did not. He was a very proud man, and one moreover whose life-long principle it was to resist every encroachment of external influence on his own individuality of character. He never endured interference with himself; but he frequently interfered with remonstrances in order to tranquillise the mad humours of his young master. When Goethe said of himself in his old age, that he had always been conscious of an innate aristocracy which made him feel perfectly on a level with princes, and this too in its fullest measure

before as well as since receiving the diploma which ennobled him, he spoke no more than the truth. He could endure any criticism; but he could not endure any assumption of a right to influence and direct him. When the old poet Klopstock wrote to remonstrate with him, during his first year at Weimar, for the wild life he was encouraging at court, Goethe wrote back a polite reply as brief and haughty in its reserve as he could well have returned to a college companion. And it is as clear as day that the majestic mannerism of his later years was the stiffness of princeliness itself, not the petrified ceremony of a prince's satellite. But nevertheless it seems clear enough that some of the worst tendencies of his mind were fostered by his Weimar life. The man who replied to his dearest friends, Charlotte Kestner and her husband, when they expostulated on the public exposure of private relations, "Ye of little faith! Could you feel the thousandth part of what 'Werther' is to a thousand hearts, you would not reckon the sacrifice you have made towards it,"—who surprised Fräulein Delf with the assurance that "the sun-steeds of time were whirling on the light car of his destiny,"—was not the man to be improved by living in a narrow circle of admirers where none of the humiliating and busy indifference of the great world could ever draw his keen eye away from himself to those many high qualities of practical minds in which he himself was relatively deficient. It was good, even intellectually, for Goethe to have objects above himself; yet he left a social world, in which he must often have

felt himself an insignificant learner, for a literary world in which all the talent was of the same kind as his own, but far beneath it.

Again, what was far worse than this, the Weimar atmosphere was stagnant with moral evil. Laborious indolence and pleasure-seeking were the great occupations of the greater part of the Court. The women had no employment at once so fashionable and interesting as intrigues. "There is not one of them," says Schiller, "who has not had a *liaison;*" and women's influence was the only influence which completely reached Goethe. "The first years at Weimar were perplexed with love-affairs," as he told Eckermann; and what love-affairs! One of them at least with a married woman, whose children were growing up around her to learn that the family-bond had no sacredness in their mother's heart, and that fidelity and purity were far less noble than passion in the eyes of the great poet of their nation. We know well that this was the sin of the century, and may not be in any large measure attributed to the personal laxity of any one man's conscience. But all the more is it to be lamented that Goethe left a social atmosphere where domestic virtue was held comparatively sacred, for one where it was almost a thing unknown. There was indefinitely more difference between Frankfort morals and Weimar morals than between the social virtue of a wholesome busy city like Manchester and that of an idle watering-place cursed with barracks. Weimar was a place, like all idle places, eager for self-conscious stimu-

lants of enjoyment. And it acted upon Goethe accordingly. He became more devoted to that *cultus* of his own character, which would not, perhaps, have been his worst occupation in a Court where there was very little so much worth attending to, if unfortunately it had not been the very worst influence for that character that he should thus affectionately nurse it. He never became, indeed, at all deeply infected either with the vulgar selfishness or with the frivolity of Court-life. It did not act upon him in this way. He had not been a year at Weimar before he felt its genuine hollowness, and busied himself as much as in him lay with the regular discharge of official duty, and the busy earnestness of artistic creation. Always generous by nature, always deeply touched with the sight of suffering, it is pleasant, but not surprising, to find him giving away a sixth part of his income in charity, and still less surprising to find him doing it in secret, so that his left hand knew not what his right hand did. There never was a man less influenced by the love of approbation: he never through his whole life seems even to have felt the passion strongly agitating him, except perhaps in the flush of the first months of his 'Werther'-fame. His pride alone would have raised him above it, even if he had not had so strong a feeling of contempt for the public judgment that he was scarcely shaken by disapprobation, and scarcely confirmed by approbation. He had a thorough contempt for ostentation. When he was giving a poor man two hundred dollars a year, no one knew of it; and

moreover he continued to give it, in spite of rather graceless and ungrateful acceptance of his charity. He pointed out calmly to his pensioner the unfitness of such conduct, and gave on. The way in which Weimar affected him so unfavourably was not by the contagion of selfishness, but rather by giving him such an inferior world with which to compare himself—by the easy victory it permitted him in active goodness on the one hand, and by the contagion of impurity on the other. Goethe had no active religious conviction, and of all men most needed to look up to his companions: he was in almost every direction, at this time, obliged to look down. "The mind," he said, "is *driven back all the more into itself*, the more one accommodates oneself to other men's modes of life, instead of seeking to adapt them to one's own: it is like the relation of the musician to his instrument"—a remarkable indication that these "other men's" life was on a platform below rather than above the speaker. Goethe felt that his companions were in a sense his "instruments," from whom he could bring forth fine music,—which was, however, his own music after all, not theirs. But he would not have felt so amongst men and women who, even in mere practical power and domestic virtue and devotedness, called forth his reverence as standing higher than himself.

The thing that jars upon the mind throughout Goethe's life, in his letters, his books—every thing he said and did—is the absence of any thing like devotion to any being, human or divine, morally above himself. God he re-

garded as inscrutable, and as best left to reveal Himself. The future life was not yet. From all men he withdrew himself in a sort of kindly isolation—sympathising with them, aiding them, helping them against themselves, understanding them, but never making any of them the object of his life. The object of his life, so far as any man can consciously and permanently have one, was the completion of that ground-plan of character presented to the world in Johann Wolfgang Goethe. To perfect this he denied himself much both of enjoyment and real happiness; to keep this ground-plan intact, or to build upon it, he was always ready to sacrifice either himself or any body else. To this he sacrificed Frederika's love, Lili's love, and his own love for them—the friendship of any who attempted to interfere with his own modes of self-development; to this he would at any time have sacrificed, had he supposed it needful, the favour of the duke and his position at Court; to this, in fact, his life was one long offering. There was nothing Goethe would not have given up for others, except any iota of what he considered to be his own individuality. To tend that was his idolatry. And that this self-worship grew rapidly upon him at Weimar, no one can doubt. Only compare the tone of 'Wilhelm Meister' with that of 'Götz von Berlichingen.' Compare even his letters to the Frau von Stein with his letters to the Kestners. There is a real sense of humility and remorse gleaming out at times in the latter: with all his susceptibility to other persons' sufferings, there is nothing but at most a

sense of error, regret at past mistakes, generally merged in satisfaction at his own steady progress towards "clearness and self-rule," pervading the former. Compare the picture of the cold, self-absorbed, remorseless Lothario, held up as it is to admiration as a kind of ideal, with the ideal of Goethe's earlier days. Compare even Wilhelm Meister himself, who is meant, we are told, to be a progressive character, with Werther, who is meant to be a deteriorating character. With all his hysterics, there is far more trace of humility and sense of the wrong he is doing, and even effort to undo it, in the latter than in the former. Mr. Lewes discovers a "healthy" moral in Wilhelm Meister—that he is raised from "mere impulse to the subordination of reason, from dreaming self-indulgence to practical duty, from self-culture to sympathy." This is a mere dream of Mr. Lewes's. Wilhelm seems to me to become, so far as he changes at all, more selfish as he goes on. He begins with a real deep affection, and ends with the most cold and insipid of "preferences," which he is far from sure *is* a preference. He begins with resisting, and yet finally yields to, mere physical passion. He begins with an enthusiasm for at least one art, and ends with an enthusiasm for none. He begins with a passionate love of fidelity, and ends with worshipping Lothario, whose only distinction is calm superiority to such ideas. In short, he begins a kind-hearted enthusiastic milksop, and ends a kind-hearted milksop, with rather more experience and more judgment, but without any enthusiasm and with far

laxer morality. If this be Goethe's notion of progress, it gives but a painful idea of Goethe. The only element in which Wilhelm is made to grow better is knowledge and coolness; in every thing else he degrades. You can see that even 'Werther,' much more 'Götz,' was written with a much distincter feeling of right and wrong, of the contrast between real strength and real weakness, between domestic purity and guilt, than 'Wilhelm Meister.'

And in purity of thought the change is more remarkable still. Goethe was not infected with the commonplace selfishness and frivolity of Court life—he was only driven in upon himself. He *was* infected with its impurity. His former writings had been coarse; but they were not coarser than the day, not so coarse as Shakespeare, not near so coarse as Fielding. 'Götter, Helden und Wieland' and 'Götz' are delicate to many parts of 'Tom Jones.' But while most of his later writings are perhaps less coarse than his earlier, they are indefinitely more tainting. The fragment of the 'Letters from Switzerland,' at first intended to be pieced on to the beginning of 'Werther,' several portions of 'Wilhelm Meister,' not a few minor poems, and parts of the 'Elective Affinities,' emulate Rousseau in their prurience. The "plague of microscopes" with which, as Emerson says, Goethe was pursued, follows about everywhere that aweless mind. Schiller (quoted by Mr. Lewes) says, that "whatever is permitted to innocent nature is permitted also" to the artist; but Goethe gazes away every shrinking reserve of "innocent nature" with bold curious

eye. This he seems to have learned in Weimar society. Goethe was in his own life higher, I believe, than he was in his works—fuller in sympathy and generous self-denials for others' sake than he ever makes his heroes to be. But his works betray the moral standard by which he consciously moulded himself,—the absolute prominence in his mind of the aim of self-cultivation—the infinite value he attached to *un*moral self-mastery as an an *end* and as in itself far higher than any duty for the sake of which he might master himself—the great deficiency of fidelity of nature, and of the purity with which fidelity is usually associated, and the general absence of moral reverence. They also reflect the geniality, the large charity, the intellectual wisdom, the complete independence of praise or blame, and the thorough truthfulness of mind which marked him throughout life. Goethe never deceived himself about himself.

During the ten years of Weimar life, before his Italian journey, Goethe's external life had but few recorded events. He was ennobled in 1782. He carried on a correspondence of billets with the Frau von Stein, which are extremely tiresome reading, and were never meant for publication. Mr. Lewes is very desirous to prove that all the trifling was on the lady's side, and that whenever she drew back from Goethe's advances, it was only in the spirit of a flirt. It is not a charitable view. In the complete absence of her letters, we know nothing about the matter. It does not seem at all impossible that visitings of remorse and delicacy, and real doubt of

the disinterested devotedness of a man who considered so little her other domestic and social relations, may have led, in the earlier years of this connection, to the vibrations of feeling which are reflected in Goethe's replies. There is no need to judge the matter at all. It is almost the only case in which Mr. Lewes paints another in dark colours, without justification, for his hero's sake.

During these years Goethe wrote 'Iphigenia' and a part of 'Tasso' in their earliest shape; and worked hard at 'Egmont,' besides the composition of the finest part of 'Wilhelm Meister.' Nothing is more striking than the infinite distance between Goethe's success in imagining women and men. The feminine characters in Goethe's works are as living, we dare almost say more living than Shakespeare's, though there is much less variety and range in his conceptions of them. His men are often creditable sketches; sometimes faint, sometimes entirely shadowy; they are *never* so lifelike that we cannot imagine them more so. But his women are like most of his lyrical poems—perfect. "My idea of women is not one drawn from external realities," said Goethe to Eckermann, "but it is inborn in me, or else sprang up, God knows how. My delineations of women are therefore all successful. They are all better than are to be met with in actual life." "The more incommensurable and incomprehensible for the understanding, a poetic production is, so much the better," he said on another occasion; and judged by this standard also, almost all

his women (the dull Theresa and Natalia in the later part of 'Wilhelm Meister' alone excepted) are better than almost any of his men. His men are conceptions badly outlined; his women spring up unconsciously out of his nature, exactly like his smaller poems. Mariana, Philina, and Mignon in 'Wilheim Meister,' Clärchen in 'Egmont,' Gretchen in 'Faust,' and Ottilie in the 'Elective Affinities,' are characters any one of which would immortalise a poet. We think the reason of this lies deep in the nature of Goethe's genius.

There is a tiresome dispute whether he is more objective or subjective. He is really as much one as the other; for you find in all his poems at once a vague indefinite self, reflecting a defined and clearly outlined influence which impresses that self. His own mind is the sheet of water which reflects the image, and you see only that it stretches vaguely away far beyond and beneath the image it is reflecting; but what catches the eye is the clear outline of the reflected object in the water. His imagination was passive, not active; it did not, like Shakespeare's, by its own inherent energy mould itself into living shapes, and pass into new forms of existence. It always waited to be acted on, to be determined, to receive an influence; and then, while under the spell or pressure of that influence, it pictured with perfect fidelity the impressing power. Goethe was so far dramatic that he was never absorbed in depicting the mere result on himself, but rather reflected back with faithful minuteness the influence which produced these

results. Where (as in 'Werther,' and perhaps 'Tasso') he was mainly occupied in painting the internal effect produced, he was far vaguer and less successful than where he lent his imagination to reflect truly the external influence which had thus deeply affected it. But still it was a passive imagination—*i. e.* one which acted under the spell of external influences, and generally sensuous influences—not one which went voluntarily forth to throw itself into new forms and moulds. Hence, though far the best part of his poems is that in which external objects and social impulses are rendered again, you always find the vague mental reflecting surface by which they are thus given back; you always have both the deep dim Goetheish mirror and the fine outlined object which skims over it. The two never coalesce, as is the case in Shakespeare. If you have a Gretchen living before your eyes, you must have with her, as the condition of her existence, the shadowy Faust whom she impresses. The point of sight of the picture requires the presence of Faust; not because she is delineated *through* the effect produced on Faust's nature, but because you really only see that portion of her nature which was turned to Faust, and no other side. It may be noticed that, perfect as Goethe's women are, they are never very finely drawn in their mutual influence *on each other;* it is only in the presence of the lover who is for the time Goethe's representative that they are so strikingly painted. Even their lovely songs only express the same aspect of their character. Indeed it is of the essence of

Goethe's feminine characters to express themselves in song. Each of them is a distinct fountain of song. But the current of all these songs sets straight towards the poet himself, who is always in love with these creations of his own genius. As an instance, take the lovely little song of Clärchen in 'Egmont,' of which I attempt an English version for my non-German readers :—

Freudvoll	Cheerful
Und leidvoll,	And tearful,
Gedankenvoll sein ;	With quick busy brain ;
Langen	Swayed hither
Und bangen	And thither
In schwebender Pein ;	In fluttering pain ;
Himmelhoch jauchzend,	Cast down unto death—
Zum Tode betrübt :	Soaring gaily above ;
Glücklich allein	Oh, happy alone
Ist die Seele, die liebt.	Is the heart that can love.

If Goethe paints two women alone in each other's company, the scene either fails, or they are both talking away towards some imaginary masculine centre ; and instead of being a telling dialogue, it falls into two monologues. Hence Goethe seldom attempts this at all. The scene between the two Leonoras is the worst in 'Tasso,' and those between Ottilie and Charlotte the worst in the 'Elective Affinities ;' that between Clärchen and her mother in 'Egmont' is really only a soliloquy of Clärchen's ; that between Elizabeth and Maria in 'Götz' paints no mutual influence of the women on each other—they are simply placed in juxtaposition.

And Goethe's imaginative power is not only passive,—

not only waits to be influenced,—but it is generally a sensuous influence that most easily and deeply impresses it. Hence, he not merely paints special women, but he can always give the very essence of a feminine atmosphere to characters not at all individually well-marked. He is so sensitive to the general social influence diffused by women, that he makes you feel a feminine power at work almost without copying the distinguishing peculiarities of any particular person; he can make a woman a very living woman without being what is called a *character* at all. This is what few can do. Mignon and Philina and Adelheid and Ottilie are women and something more—they are characters, and we should know them when we met them among a thousand. But all human beings are not thus marked characters; and when they are not, most authors in attempting to picture them become merely faint and vague. They depend on special peculiarities for the life of their pictures. Not so Goethe. Gretchen is little more than a simple peasant-girl. She has not a single striking characteristic; yet she is his finest creation. Clärchen and Mariana are a little more distinctively moulded, but very slightly; and yet they too live more in us than most of our own acquaintances. The little play 'Die Geschwister' (The Brother and Sister) has a delightful heroine, who is nothing at all more than an ordinary affectionate girl; yet she has more life than would fill out a hundred "characteristic sketches" of modern novelists. It is Goethe's extreme sensitiveness to all feminine influence that gave him this

power. *Men* exercised in general no such influence over him, hence his imagination is never impressed by them; he has to string up his powers of observation to draw them by sheer effort, and he seldom succeeds conspicuously even in delineating himself. Werther is scarcely so much a delineation of himself as of a series of emotions by which he had been agitated. Goethe needed to have some fascinating power taking hold of his imagination in order to call out its full strength. Nature could do it; women could do it; but he could not without such external help fascinate the eye of his own imagination. He could picture the influences which touched him most; but never, *as a whole*, the nature which they thus stirred. You do indeed get some notion of his men, who are all more or less quarried out of his own nature; but it is not by means of any unique influence which accompanies them everywhere, but only by a sort of secondary inference from the successive states of emotion in which we are accustomed to see them. Tasso, Werther, &c., are never personally known to us; we have gathered up a very good notion of them, but the mark of organic unity which distinguishes living influence from the fullest description has not been set upon them. Edward, in the 'Elective Affinities' is perhaps the most skilful portrait amongst Goethe's male figures. But Goethe could not outline any character—did not even know the outlines of his own. Where he succeeded, it was not by outline, like Scott, but by a single key-note, usually a feminine undertone running through every thing they say. When

that is wanting, the character may be true, but does not hang together; it is a loosely-knit affair.

That Goethe should be called by Mr. Lewes "more Greek than German" struck me with astonishment .But in the special criticisms on his works Mr. Lewes virtually retracts altogether this general verdict. Greek poetry is never the product of this *passive* imagination, that waits for a distinct impression and then reflects back the impressing power. And moreover its subjects are as different from Goethe's as its intellectual process. It does not occupy itself with character so much as events. The characters are there more for the sake of the circumstance than the circumstance for the characters. And so too with the gods themselves. There is no anxiety to display their personal characters; they are not explained as in later times; their caprices or their kindness is only a part of the machinery for enlisting human interest. But Goethe makes a study of *his* Greek gods and demigods, and takes his idea entirely from the most god-like element he could feel in his own character—his cool self-dependence, and his power of shaking himself free at will from the acute impressions of pain or pleasure. There was nothing Greek at all about the character of Goethe's *intellect.* What Mr. Lewes had in his mind was the heathen element (not specially Greek) in his *character.* The entire superseding of personal trust by self-reliance, the absence of all trace of humility, the calm superior glance which he cast into the mystery around but never into the holiness above him, gave often a heathen colour-

ing to his works; but his cast of intellect is strikingly, distinctively German, far more so than Schiller's. For one whose mind yielded freely to any sensitive impression, he had a wonderful power of shaking off voluntarily all adhering emotions, and raising his head high above the mists they stirred. This power of assuming at will a cruel moral indifference to that which he did not choose to have agitating him, is the feeling he has so finely embodied in the picture of the gods contained in the song of the Fates in 'Iphigenia,'—far the finest thing in a poem rich in small beauties, but without any successful delineation of human character. This last has been so well translated by an American writer,[1] and represents so truly a characteristic phase of Goethe's mind, that I will give it as a pendant to Mr. Lewes's translation from the 'Prometheus.'

"Within my ear there rings that ancient song,—
Forgotten was it and forgotten gladly,—
Song of the Parcæ, which they shuddering sang
When from his golden seat fell Tantalus.
They suffered in his wrongs; their bosom boiled
Within them, and their song was terrible.
To me and to my sister in our youth
The nurse would sing it, and I marked it well.

'The gods be your terror,
Ye children of men;
They hold the dominion
In hands everlasting,

[1] Mr. N. L. Frothingham. "Metrical Pieces, translated and original." Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1855. A word or two is altered.

All free to exert it
As listeth their will.

Let him fear them doubly
Whome'er they've exalted!
On crags and on cloud-piles
The seats are made ready
Around the gold tables.

Dissension arises:
Then tumble the feasters
Reviled and dishonoured
To gulfs of deep midnight;
And look ever vainly
In fetters of darkness
For judgment that's just.

But THEY remain seated
At feasts never failing
Around the gold tables.
They stride at a footstep
From mountain to mountain;
Through jaws of abysses
Steams towards them the breathing
Of suffocate Titans.
Like offerings of incense
A light-rising vapour.

They turn, the proud masters,
From whole generations
The eye of their blessing;
Nor will in the children
The once well-belovèd
Still eloquent features
Of ancestor see.'

So sang the dark sisters.
The old exile heareth
That terrible music
In caverns of darkness,
Remembereth his children
And shaketh his head."

The metre, like the thought, has a heathen cast. It speaks of cold elevation above all human prayers.

In the autumn of 1786 Goethe "stole away" from Carlsbad, having received secret permission from the duke for a lengthened journey in Italy, which had long been the dream of his life. Mr. Lewes has made no use of the many marvellous and most characteristic touches which Goethe's journal-letters of this tour contain. He speaks of them as of little interest. To me they seem the most fascinating and delightful of the prose works of Goethe. They not only illustrate his character, as it showed itself in the quiet isolated study of beauty, but they explain more than any other of his works the common ground in his mind where science and poetry met. I must give two very characteristic glimpses into his character which the incidents of this journey furnish. On his way to Venice he turned aside to visit the Lago di Garda, and took his way down the lake in a boat. A strong south wind obliged them to put in to Malsesina, on the east side of the lake, a little spot in the Venetian territory close to the (then) boundary between the Venetian and Austrian states. Goethe went up to sketch the old dismantled castle. He was absolutely alone and unknown—had not even introductions to any authorities in Venice. The stranger was observed, and soon many of the villagers had assembled round him with signs of displeasure. One man seized his drawing, and tore it up. Others fetched the podesta. Goethe found that he was taken for an Austrian spy sent to make drawings of

the strong points on the boundary. The podesta's clerk was threatening, the podesta himself was a captive to his clerk. Goethe was near being sent as a prisoner to Verona to account for his conduct. Instead of feeling nervous and embarrassed, however, he was enjoying the scene, and undertaking to instruct the Italian peasants in the pleasures and pursuits of an artist. "I stood on my steps, leaning with my back against the door, and surveyed the constantly increasing crowd. The curious dull glances, the good-natured expression in most faces, and all that usually characterises a mob, gave me the most agreeable impression." He assured them all, in his best Italian, that he drew for beauty and not for political designs. He explained that they could not possibly see so much beauty in the old castle, which they had known all their lives, as he did. The morning sun threw tower, walls, and rocks into the most picturesque light, and he began to describe the picture to them with a painter's enthusiasm. These picturesque objects being, however, in the rear of his audience, who did not wish to turn quite away from him, "they twisted round their heads like the birds which they call 'wrynecks,' in order to see with their eyes what I was thus glorifying to their ears." This ridiculous scene vividly reminded Goethe of the "chorus of birds" in the play of Aristophanes, and with intense amusement, he would not let them off without a detailed dissertation on every element of beauty in the picture, particularly dwelling on the ivy which hung about the walls. His presence of mind extricated him from the scrape.

A still more characteristic incident occurs on his voyage from Sicily back to Naples. The ship should have passed the straits between the Island of Capri and the mainland. Evening came on; Vesuvius glowed brightly; sheet-lightning was in the air; it was a dead calm; the captain had missed the course; a very slow but decided under-current was drifting them straight on the rocks of Capri; the herdsmen were visible on the rocks, shouting that the ship would strand; on deck was a crowd of Italian peasants—men, women, and children; handkerchiefs were held up to try and find a breath of air by which they might be saved; the women screamed reproaches on the captain, and all was shrieking and confusion. "I," says Goethe, "to whom anarchy had ever been more hateful than death itself, found it impossible to be longer silent. I stood up, and represented to them that their cries and shrieks were stunning the ears and brains of those from whom alone help could be expected. As for you, I said, retire into yourselves, and then put up your most fervent prayers to the Mother of God, with whom it alone rests, whether she will intercede with her Son to do for you what He once did for the apostles, when, on the stormy lake of Tiberias, the waves were already washing into the ship while the Lord slept; and yet, when the helpless disciples awakened Him, He immediately commanded the winds to be still, as He can now command the breeze to blow, if it be His holy will." These words had the best effect. The women fell on their knees, left off abusing the captain, and fell to prayer.

They were so near the rocks, that the men seized hold of beams to stave the ship off, directly they should be able to reach them. "My sea-sickness, which returned in spite of all this, compelled me to go down to the cabin. I threw myself half-stunned on my mattress, and yet with a certain pleasant sensation, which seemed to emanate from the sea of Tiberias; for the picture in Merian's illustrated Bible hovered quite clearly before my eyes. And thus the force of all sensuous-moral impressions is always strongest when men are quite thrown back into themselves." Goethe lay here "half-asleep," with death impending, till his companion came down to inform him that a light breeze had just sprung up to save them. There is no incident more characteristic of the calm self-possessed artist in Goethe's whole life,—the "musician adapting himself to his instrument;" playing thus skilfully on strings which were deficient in his own mind, in order to bring out tones of feeling for which there were ulterior reasons; then lying down to dream so vividly of what he really held to be but a picturesque legend, that all the awe of death was held at a distance by the vivid light of that "inward eye which is the bliss of solitude." This one scene brings out the secret at once of the man's vast personal influence, and of the poet's yielding wax-like imagination, more vividly than any incident of his life.

It was in his Italian journey that his poetic powers culminated, and that science and art met in his mind. You see the meeting-point in his descriptions of what he

saw. He fits his mind so close to the objects he studies, that he not only takes off a perfect impression of their present condition, but becomes conscious of their secrets of tendency, and has often a glimpse back into what they have been. Goethe discovered, as is well known, that all the parts of a plant—stalk, leaf, stamen, petal, fruit—are but various modifications of the same essential germ, best exhibited in the leaf. It was a most characteristic discovery. But to understand the mental process by which it was made—to prove that *it* was not, in him, due to a mere scientific tendency—just look at this glance of his into the essence of a quite different thing,—the amphitheatre, written at Verona: "It ought not to be seen empty, but quite full of men; for, properly speaking, such an amphitheatre is made in order to give the people the imposing spectacle of themselves, to amuse the people with themselves. If any thing worth looking at happens on a flat space, the hindmost seek in every possible way to get on higher ground than the foremost; they get on to benches, roll up casks, bring up carriages, and plank them over, cover any hill in the neighbourhood, and thus a *crater* forms itself. If the spectacle is often repeated, such a crater is artificially constructed," &c. Now this illustrates the way in which Goethe became so great in criticism, so great in science, so great in description, and so great in the more conscious and less inspired part of his poetry. He moulded himself with such flexible mind to every thing he studied, that he caught not only the existing present, but the state which

had just preceded, the state which would follow; he caught the thread as it untwined, he caught not the "being" only *(das Sein)*, but the "becoming" *(das Werden)*. He had no gift for experimental science. He did not even *believe* in laws of nature that did not make themselves felt on the living surface of things. He rejected "refractional" theories of light with scorn, because the coincidence that certain geometrical and arithmetical properties attach to the laws of colour (and it really is nothing more than a coincidence) did not explain in any way the living colours as they shine upon the eye. What is it to the living perception that the length of the wave of the red ray is *greater* than that of the violet ray; does length explain any thing about colour? It is only a sort of inward thread of order running through the phenomena, which is quite independent of the essence of the phenomena as they affect the living organs of man. Goethe had no faculty at all for this experimental detection of aids to *knowledge*, which are not in any way aids to living insight. He thought it a kind of mathematical back-stair to optics, which it was mean to desire; you ought to look the phenomenon livingly in the face, and explore its symptoms as you do the physiology of a plant or an animal. He used the microscope to detect what is really going on; but he despised an hypothesis which left the physiology of colour just where it was.

Indeed, his science and his poetry and his descriptions alike were of the microscopic order; not that they had the confinement of the microscope, for his eye ranged

freely; but I mean, that he rather pierced nature and life at many points in succession, letting in gleams of an indefinite vista everywhere, than combined all he conceived and saw in one co-existing whole. Look at his finest poems and descriptions. It is the intensely vivid gleam thrown on single spots, not the aspect of the whole, that makes you seem to see with your own eyes what he describes. Thus, in one of his finest poems, 'Hermann and Dorothea,' every touch of description will illustrate what I mean. And the sense of breadth and freedom pervading it is given in the same way by transient glances sidewards and forwards, which open out little vistas of life in many directions, without completing them in any:—

"Und die Hengste rannten nach Hause, *begierig des Stalles;*
Aber die Wolke des Staubes quoll unter den mächtigen Hufen.
Lange noch stand der Jüngling und sah den Staub sich erheben,
Sah den Staub sich zerstreu'n; so stand er ohne Gedanken."[7]

What a vivid *impression* (it is only one or two strokes for a picture, not properly a picture) is here given, by means of pursuing a little side-path of insight into the feelings of horses, and then fixing the eye intensely just on that dreamy cloud of dust in the distance which would most catch the eye of a man in a reverie! It is always by casting these isolated piercing glances in two or three directions that Goethe produces his vivid impressions.

[7] And the horses started off home, pricking their ears for the stable,
But a cloud of dust grew under the rushing hoofs of their gallop.
Long the youth stood still, and watched the dust whirling upwards,
Watched the dust settle down,—thus stood he vacant in spirit,

When Hermann and Dorothea, for instance, are walking by moonlight to the village, there is no attempt to paint the scene; but each object, as it comes in view, is made to flash on the eye of the reader. Thus:—

"'How sweet is the glorious moonshine, as clear it is as the day-light;
I can surely see in the town the houses and courtyards quite plainly,
In that gable a casement,—I fancy I count every pane there.'
Then they rose, and went downwards through the cornfield together,
Dividing the thick-standing corn, and enjoying the splendour above them;
And thus they had reached the vineyard, and passed from the light into shadow."

When Goethe returned from Italy in 1788, his genius had reached its highest maturity. 'Faust' (his greatest work) was virtually written, though afterwards modified, and not published for eighteen years. 'Iphigenia' and 'Egmont' had received their last touches, and 'Tasso' was all but finished. The really fine part of 'Wilhelm Meister' was in existence; all that he added afterwards was a dreary superinduced element of "high art," a painful "Hall of the Past,"—except indeed the religious episode, which is a study from memory, a reproduction of the "experience" of a gentle mystic whom both he and his mother had dearly loved. 'Hermann und Dorothea' is the only great poem of any length which he wrote afterwards, in 1796, and it is far the most perfect, though not the richest of them all.

During his Italian residence he had only fallen in love once. He returned reluctantly to the north, like a child

from a Christmas visit, feeling that everything at home was old and slow, and that he, coming from the sweet south, was bringing "gold for brass, what was worth a hundred oxen for what was worth ten." Even the Frau von Stein was tedious; the Italian lady had displaced her. In this mood he fell in with Christiane Vulpius, a girl of no culture and considerably lower rank than himself, who, after being for seventeen years his mistress, became in 1806 his wife. There can be no doubt that he was passionately in love at first, and that his passion ripened afterwards into a real and deeper affection, which had sufficient strength, when he found his heart attracted to another, to enable him to resist the danger and remain faithful to the mother of his child, in spite of the serious estranging influences arising from her intemperance. Goethe's connection with Christiane, if judged by the lax morality of his age,—by which alone we can fairly judge him, when we have once admitted, as we must do, that he was in no way morally purer than his age—that, indeed, in his estimate of these matters he had become less pure since his residence in Weimar,—was surely not the worst of his life. It is in its origin that it is most offensive. That he should either allow himself to encourage passion without love, and feel no horror, no self-abasement, but rather immortalise it by using it as literary capital for "elegies;" or, on the other hand, if he did feel real love for this poor girl, that he could endure to write about her to friends in the tone of his letters to the Frau von Stein,—is one

of those facts concerning Goethe which makes one feel that a wider gulf divided his nature from purity and fidelity than any merely passionate sins could create. During the first months of his *liaison* he writes, in answer to the Frau von Stein's remonstrances, "And what is this relation? Who is beggared by it? Who lays any claim to the feelings I give to the poor creature? who to the hours I pass with her?" And again: "I will say nothing in excuse; but I beg thee to help me, so that the relation which is so objectionable to thee may not become yet worse, but remain as it is. Give me thy confidence again; look at the thing in a natural light; allow me to speak to thee quietly and reasonably about it, and I may hope that all will be once more right between us." That a man should write in this tone about a woman he really loved, and keep her in so humiliating a position in which he knew that she was a mark for the contempt of his friends is hardly credible. And yet, if he did not really love her, that he should have felt no self-reproach and disgust at his own conduct, while he calmly worked it up into poetry, is still more revolting and still more incredible. The truth seems to be that he did really love her, and yet was insensible to the dishonour to himself and to her implied in writing and *thinking* of his relation to her in this way, and permitting his friends' neglect. Mr. Lewes says that Christiane declared later she had herself resisted the marriage. Possibly she may have wished to excuse Goethe; possibly it really was so; but

the decision lay with him, and no false theories can relieve him from the charge of permitting a permanent dishonour to rest upon the woman who was to him in the place of a wife. He took her to live with him immediately on the birth of his son, and never again forsook her. But I can hardly doubt that one great exciting cause for the habits of intemperance in her which caused him so much misery was the consciousness of her miserable position in society,—slighted as she was by the very friends whom Goethe most honoured and loved, Goethe permitting the slight. Schiller never seems to have sent her one greeting in his letters, nor even alludes to her existence; while Goethe's messages to Schiller's wife are constant and courteous. Contrasts of this kind should surely have stung him to the quick, if he really honoured and loved her as a wife. Since Mr. Lewes's book was first published, letters have appeared from Goethe and his wife to Dr. Nicolaus Meyer of Bremen, a medical student in Jena in 1798, who resided in Goethe's house in the winter 1799-1800. The correspondence adds little to what we knew; but the letters from Christiane Vulpius (who in 1806 became Christiane Goethe) confirm Mr. Lewes's conception of her as an uncultivated but not vulgar person; and one or two show great depth of feeling. The editor intimates that they were poorly spelt and worse written; but in those days many ladies of rank had little knowledge of this kind. The letters—both Goethe's and his wife's—are mostly about herrings, butter, and port wine.

Goethe's letters are seldom very good. He saved up his best things for type. One does not expect literary merit from Christiane Vulpius. But her letters are simple, house-wifely, and friendly. It seems she had a genius for jams, which had in part gained her Meyer's esteem. Parts of one or two letters, written in 1805, during a dangerous illness of Goethe's, give a glimpse of the thread of pain in her life. She tells Meyer that Goethe has "now for three months back never had an hour of health, and frequently periods when one fancies he must die. Think only of me—who have not, excepting yourself and him, a single friend in the world; and you, dear friend, by reason of the distance, are as good as lost . . . . Here there is no friend to whom I could tell all that lies on my heart. I might have many; but I cannot again form such a friendship with any one, and shall be forced to tread my path alone." Seldom, indeed, in these letters, does she express feeling of this kind, which gives it more meaning when it is expressed. She says again, "I live a life of pure anxiety." Then she writes a better account, adding, that though better, she fears "it is but patchwork. O God, when I think a time may come when I may stand absolutely alone, many a cheerful hour is made wretched."[8] The sen-

[8] I have before alluded to the fact, that Goethe's passion for Minna Herzlieb gave rise to his novel of the 'Elective Affinities,' and is depicted in the love of Edward for Ottilie. It seems, now, not improbable that Meyer's friendship for Christiane Vulpius at least suggested the relation of the Captain to Charlotte in the same

tence in which Goethe announces to Meyer, in 1806, his own marriage, is characteristic. He speaks of the French occupation of Weimar, and the misery it caused, and adds: "In order to cheer these sad days with a festivity, I and my little home-friend (Hausfreundin) yesterday resolved to enter with full formality into the state of holy matrimony, with which notification, I entreat you to send us a good supply of butter and other provisions that will bear carriage."

Early in the new century, Goethe's growing attachment to Minna Herzlieb seems to have given rise to one of the richest groups of minor poems that he ever wrote; and of one of these so beautiful a translation has come into my hands,[9] that I venture to hope it will at least convey some feeling of the charm of Goethe's little ballads:—

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novel. Meyer must have been at least six or seven years younger than Christiane, as he was born in 1775. But it seems from these letters that the friendship between them had been strong, and not without sentiment. Christiane keeps Meyer's picture in her room, and speaks of the constant pleasure and comfort that she derived from looking at it. It was after, and immediately after, Meyer's own marriage in 1806, that Goethe determined to take this step, and announced it to him in the curious form given above. There is no allusion at all to her marriage in any of Christiane's letters to Meyer. She speaks of his own marriage thus:—"I have been especially pleased to hear that you have at last resolved to enter the state of holy matrimony, in which I heartily wish you happiness, and believe that you will also be convinced of these my sentiments." Meyer and his wife visited Weimar on their wedding journey: a great chasm in the correspondence occurs immediately afterwards.

[9] Translated by Mr. J. C. Richmond lately the 'Native Minister' of New Zealand.

THE HILL CASTLE.

Aloft stands a castle hoary
On yonder craggy height,
Where of old each gate and doorway
Was guarded by horse and knight.

The doors and the gates lie in ashes,
And silence broods over all;
I clamber about unchallenged
On the ancient mouldering wall.

Close here lay a cellar, of yore
Well filled with the costliest wine;
With the bottle and pitcher no more
Steps the maiden merrily in.

No more in the hall the beaker
She sets for the welcome guest;
No more for the holy altar
She fills the flask of the priest.

To the thirsty squire in the courtyard
No more the flagon she gives;
No more for the fleeting favour
Their fleeting thanks she receives.

For burnt are the ceilings and floors,
Into ashes long long ago passed;
And corridor, chapel, and stairs,
Are splinters and rubbish and dust.

Yet when on a merry morning
From these crags I saw with delight,
With lute and with wine, my darling
Ascending the stony height,—

Seemed a gay entertainment to burst
From the dulness of still decay,
And it went as, in times long passed,
On a joyous and festive day.

It seemed the most stately rooms
Were prepared for some guest of worth;
It seemed from those hearty old times
A loving pair had stepped forth;

And as if stood the holy father
Within his chapel hard by,
And asked, "Will ye have one another?"
And we smilingly answered "Ay."

And when our hearts' deep emotion
In music broke forth aloud,
Rang out the mellow-voiced echo
In answer—instead of the crowd.

And when, at the coming of even,
In silence all was entranced,
And the sun from the glowing heaven
On the craggy summit glanced,

The squire and the maiden, like nobles,
Shine out in that golden blaze;
Again the goblet she proffers,
And again his thanks he pays.

Goethe seems ultimately to have battled firmly with, and finally subdued, the affection which thus renewed the freshness of his poetry with a second spring of even greater beauty than the first; but the whole story, as he has embodied it in the 'Elective Affinities,' is a thoroughly repulsive one, and no mind but one so destitute as Goethe's of natural remorse for the most humiliating class of sins, could have given such experience publicity in a work of art. The book betrays, in spite of its power, some of the diffuseness of age; a very great part of it is devoted to describing the laying down of a new gravel-walk and the making a summer-house.

In 1816 his wife died; and Goethe's burst of grief was terrible. We are told[1] that he utterly lost his presence of mind, kneeled down beside her death-bed, and seizing her hands, cried out, "Thou wilt not forsake me! No, no; thou durst not forsake me." The verse he wrote on the day of her death has more true affection than all his poems of passion together.

The last sixteen years of Goethe's life were passed in tranquil labour at the completion of his unfinished works. Now and then he wrote a lovely little poem. In 1818, when he was in his 70th year, came one of those little flashes of song,—giving birth to a poem like those which, he tells us, he would in his youth often get up to scribble off in the middle of the night, or write down on the first scrap of paper he found, not even venturing to set the paper straight, lest the little mechanical act should put to flight the flow of the inspiration. Its beauty is quite as strange as that of the poems of his youth. Goethe always loved the song, and said it was of the very essence of himself. Here is a faint version of it, which I insert less as a poem than as a light on the old man's character:—

AT DEAD OF NIGHT.

At dead of night I went, reluctant going—
A wee wee boy, across the churchyard-way,
To father's house, the pastor's; heaven was glowing
With star on star—oh, sweetly twinkled they
At dead of night.

[1] Preface to Meyer's 'Correspondence.'

Then in broad life, when new impellings drove me
To seek my love—impellings which she sent—
The stars and Northern-lights in strife above me—
I, going, coming, drank in sweet content
At dead of night.

Till the bright moon at last in her high season,
So pure so clear, me in my darkness found;
And with her, willing, thoughtful, vivid Reason
Her light about my past and future wound
At dead of night.

He fell in love once or twice more; and in 1823 was said to be near marrying again. The result, as usual, was *not* marriage, but an elegy—of beauty not greatly inferior to that which the poems of earlier days can show, and which, as his youngest and dearest poem, he copied out in Roman letters on fine vellum, and tied with a silk band into a red morocco cover, in which glory Eckermann saw it. Mr. Lewes, in deference to physiology, unpleasantly and untruly calls the story of an old man's life a "necrology." As a *man* Goethe was never so complete as in his old age.

The only great addition to his fame which the last twenty years of Goethe's life produced was the conversations with Eckermann,—a book which gives to the English reader a far clearer conception of his personal influence than any other of his works. He never runs an opponent through, like Dr. Johnson: indeed, he does not willingly talk with an opponent at all. He rather flows round his disciple like an atmosphere, leaks into you at every pore, and envelopes you in such a calm wide mist of wisdom, that you *can* only say what he

means you to say so long as you breathe that atmosphere. There is no possibility of a contest. There is no point to contest. He credits you with a truth whenever you open your mouth (*lässt das gelten*, as the Germans say); only he circumvents it with a whole mass of modifying thought; so that it would be easier to bring the air itself to a point than to bring the question you are discussing to an issue. In his old age he recurred again frequently to his religious belief, and some of his most fascinating conversations have relation to it. Goethe had a taste for religion, and a shrewd guess at the next world; but his mind seems to have been quite devoid of personal trust. He was perhaps the wisest man totally without moral humility and personal faith whom the world has ever seen. He took the pantheistic view of God along with the personal view of man.[2] He knew that man was a free and responsible being, but he could not attribute human attributes of any kind to God; he thought the Infinite would be best honoured by merely denying finite characteristics, and leaving Him unapproached:—

> "Feeling is all in all;
> Name but an earthly smoke,
> Darkening the glow of heaven."

And not only "name" but *definite* thought concerning God he equally rejected. "No one," he says, "now doubts the existence of God any more than his own;" but "what do we know of the idea of the divine, and what shall our narrow conceptions say of the Highest Being?"

[2] See, for instance, the fine little poem, 'Das Göttliche.'

And so of immortality also; he believed in it by a sort of extension of his insight into nature, but he put it aside as not bearing in any way on this life. "I do not doubt of our future existence, for nature cannot afford to throw away any living principle (ἐντελέχεια). But we are not all in the *same manner* immortal; and in order to manifest ourselves as a powerful living principle in the future we must *be* one." Immortality was no present aid to him; he thought we should wait to rest on it till we had gained it. "To the able man *this* world is not dumb; why should he ramble off into eternity? what he really *knows* can be apprehended." And he was annoyed with any thing that he thought a fuss about the matter.

Speaking of a poem by Tiedge relating to this subject, he says:—

"Wherever you went, there lay 'Urania' on the table. 'Urania' and immortality were the topics of every conversation. I could in no wise dispense with the happiness of believing in our future existence, and, indeed, could say, with Lorenzo de Medici, that those are dead for this life even, who have no hope for another. *But such incomprehensible subjects lie too far off, and only disturb our thoughts if made the theme of daily meditation.* Let him who believes in immortality enjoy his happiness in silence, without giving himself airs thereupon. The occasion of 'Urania' led me to observe that piety has its pretensions to aristocracy no less than noble blood. I met stupid women, who plumed themselves on believing, with Tiedge, in immortality, and I was forced to bear much catechising on this point. They were vexed by my saying I should be well pleased to be ushered into a future state after the close of this, only I hoped I should *there* meet none of those who had believed in it here. For, how should I be tormented! The pious would throng around me, and say, 'Were we not right? Did we not foresee it? Has not it

happened just as we said?' And so there would be ennui without end.

"All this fuss about such points is for people of rank, and especially women, who have nothing to do. *But an able man, who has something to do here, and must toil and strive day by day to accomplish it, leaves the future world till it comes, and contents himself with being active and useful in this.* Thoughts about immortality are also good for those who have small success here below, and I would wager that better fortune would have brought our good Tiedge better thoughts."

In only one sentence do we catch a glimpse of a time when Goethe had looked to God for a Father's help, and, at least for a moment, conceived the spiritual world not as the mere unknown space beyond life, but as the inspiring love which shines everywhere into it. "We may lean for a while," he says once, in speaking of his youth, "on our brothers and friends, be amused by acquaintances, rendered happy by those we love; but in the end man is always driven back upon himself, *and it seems as if the Divinity had so placed Himself in relation to man as not always to respond to his reverence, trust, and love; at least not in the terrible moment of need.*" There had, then, been a time when the easy familiarity with which the young man scrutinised the universe had been exchanged for the humble glance of a heart-stricken child; and he had shrunk away from that time (as he did from every hour of life when pain would have probed to the very bottom the secrets of his nature), to take refuge in the exercise of a faculty which would have been far stronger and purer had it never helped him to evade those awful pauses in existence when alone the

depths of our personal life lie bare before the inward eye, and we start to see both "whither we are going, and whence we came." Goethe deliberately turned his back upon those inroads which sin and death make into our natural habits and routine. From the pleading griefs, from the challenging guilt, from the warning shadows of his own past life, he turned resolutely away, like his own Faust, to the alleviating occupations of the present. Inch by inch he contested the inroads of age upon his existence, striving to banish the images of new graves from his thoughts long before his nature had ceased to quiver with the shock of parting; never seemingly for a moment led by grief to take conscious refuge in the love of God and his hopes of an hereafter.

And so, with his eyes still clinging to the life he left, on the 22nd March, 1832, he passed away himself, while drawing with his finger pictures in the air and murmuring a last cry for "more light." During the years which have intervened, the influence of his writings in England has steadily increased. He has been held up as the wisest man of modern days, and by some half-worshipped as a demigod. And, in truth, his was a light and spacious mind. I grant that he was the wisest man of modern days who ever lacked the wisdom of a child; the deepest who never knew what it was to kneel in the dust with bowed head and broken heart. And he was a demigod, if a demigod be a being at once more and less than ordinary men, having a power which few attain, and owing it, in part, to a deficiency in qualities in which few

are so deficient; a being who puts forth a stronger fascination over the earth because expending none of his strength in yearnings towards heaven. In this sense Goethe was a demigod:—

> "He took the suffering human race;
> He read each wound, each weakness clear;
> He struck his finger on the place,
> And said, 'Thou ailest here, and here.'"

He knew all symptoms of disease, a few alleviations, no remedies. The earth was eloquent to him, but the skies were silent. Next to Luther he was the greatest of the Germans; next—but what a gulf between! "Adequate to himself," was written on that broad calm forehead; and therefore men thronged eagerly about him to learn the incommunicable secret. It was not told, and will not be told. For man it is a weary way to God, but a wearier far to any demigod.

II.

WORDSWORTH AND HIS GENIUS.

THE commonplace modern criticism on Wordsworth is that he is too transcendental. On the other hand the criticism with which he was first assailed, which Coleridge indignantly repelled, and which is reflected in the admirable parody published among the 'Rejected Addresses,' was that he was ridiculously simple, that he made an unintelligible fuss about common feelings and common things. The reconciliation of these opposite criticisms is not difficult. He drew uncommon delights from very common things. His circle of interests was, for a poet, singularly narrow. He was a hardy Cumbrian mountaineer, with the temperament of a thoroughly frugal peasant, and a unique personal gift of discovering the deepest secondary springs of joy in what ordinary men either took as matter of course, or found uninteresting, or even full of pain. The same sort of

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power which scientific men have of studiously fixing their minds on natural phenomena till they make these phenomena yield lessons and laws of which no understanding destitute of this capacity for detaching itself entirely from the commonplace train of intellectual associations would have dreamt, Wordsworth had in relation to objects of the imagination. He could detach his mind from the commonplace series of impressions which are generated by commonplace objects or events, resist and often reverse the current of emotion to which ordinary minds are liable, and triumphantly justify the strain of rapture with which he celebrated what excites either no feeling, or weary feeling, or painful feeling, in the mass of unreflecting men. Two distinct peculiarities, and rare peculiarities of character, chiefly assisted him in this—his keen spiritual courage, and his stern spiritual frugality. Though his poetry reads so transcendental, and is so meditative, there never was a poet who was so little of a dreamer as Wordsworth. There is volition and self-government in every line of his poetry, and his best thoughts come from the steady resistance he opposes to the ebb and flow of ordinary desires and regrets. He contests the ground inch by inch with all despondent and indolent humours, and often, too, with movements of inconsiderate and wasteful joy—turning defeat into victory, and victory into defeat. He transmutes sorrows into food for lonely rapture, as he dwells upon the evidence they bear of the depth and fortitude of human nature; he transmutes the periodic joy of social conven-

tions into melancholy as he recalls how "the wiser mind"

> "Mourns less for what age takes away
> Than what it leaves behind."

No poet ever contrived by dint of "plain living and high thinking" to get nearer to the reality of such life as he understood, and to dispel more thoroughly the illusions of superficial impression.

To this same result again the rare spiritual frugality of Wordsworth greatly contributed. Poets, as a rule, lust for emotion; some of the most unique poets—like Shelley and Byron in their very different ways—pant for an unbroken succession of ardent feelings. Wordsworth, as I shall try to show, was almost a miser in his reluctance to trench upon the spiritual capital at his disposal. He hoarded his joys, and lived upon the interest which they paid in the form of hope and expectation. This is one of the most original parts of his poetic character. It was only the windfalls, as one may say, of his imagination, the accidents on which he had never counted beforehand, the delight of which he dared thoroughly to exhaust. He paused almost in awe at the threshold of any promised enjoyment, as if it were a spendthrift policy to exchange the hope for the reality. A delight once over, he multiplied it a thousand-fold through the vision of "that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude." Spiritual thrift was at the very root of his soul, and this was one of his most remarkable distinctions among a race who in spiritual things are too often

prodigals and spendthrifts. In these two characteristics lies sufficient explanation of the opposite views as to his simplicity as a poet. No poet ever drew from simpler *sources* than Wordsworth, but none ever made so much out of so little. He stemmed the commonplace currents of emotion, and often succeeded in so reversing them, that men were puzzled when they saw weakness transformed into power and sorrow into rapture. He used up successfully the waifs and strays of his imaginative life, reaped so much from opportunity, hope, and memory, that men were as puzzled at the simplicity of his delights as they are when they watch the occasions of a child's laughter.

Thus there is no poet who gives to his theme so perfectly new a birth as Wordsworth. He does not discern and revivify the *natural* life which is in it; he creates a new thing altogether, namely the life of thought which it has the power to generate in his own brooding imagination. I have already said that he uses human sorrow, for example, as an influence to stir up his own meditative spirit, till it loses its own nature and becomes

> "Sorrow that is not sorrow, but delight;
> And miserable love, that is not pain
> To hear of, for the glory that redounds
> Therefrom to human kind and what we are."[1]

And it is this strange transmuting power, which his meditative spirit exercises over all earthly and human

[1] Prelude, book xiii. p. 345.

themes, that gives to Wordsworth's poems the intense air of solitude which everywhere pervades them. He is the most solitary of poets. Of him, with far more point than of Milton, may it be said, in Wordsworth's own words, that "his soul was like a star, and dwelt apart." Of all English poems, his works are the most completely outside the sphere of Shakespeare's universal genius. In solitude only could they have originated, and in solitude only can they be perfectly enjoyed. It is impossible not to feel the loneliness of a mind which never surrenders itself to the natural and obvious currents of thought or feeling in the theme the poet takes, but changes their direction by cool side-winds from his own spiritual nature. Natural rays of feeling are refracted the moment they enter Wordsworth's imagination. It is not the theme acting on the man that you see, but the man acting on the theme. He himself consciously brings to it the spiritual forces which determine the lines of meditation; he evades, or, as I have insisted, even resists the inherent tendencies of emotion belonging to his subject; catches it up into his high spiritual imagination, and makes it yield a totally different fruit of contemplation to any which it seemed naturally likely to bear. It is in this that he differs so completely in manner from other self-conscious poets—Goethe, for instance, who in like manner always left the shadow of himself on the field of his vision. But with Goethe it is a shadow of self in quite a different sense. Goethe watches himself drifting along the tide of feeling, and

keeps an eye open outside his heart. But though he overhears himself, he does not interfere with himself; he listens breathlessly, and notes it down. Wordsworth, on the other hand, refuses to listen to this natural self at all. He knows another world of pure and buoyant meditation; and he knows that all which is transplanted into it bears there a new and nobler fruit. With fixed visionary purpose, he snatches away his subject from the influence of the lower currents it is beginning to obey, and compels it to breathe its life into that silent sky of conscious freedom and immortal hope in which his own spirit lives. Wordsworth has himself explained this fixed purpose of his imagination to stay the drift of common thoughts and common trains of feeling, and lift them up into the light of a higher meditative mood, in a passage of a remarkable letter to 'The Friend.' It illustrates so curiously the deeper methods of his genius, that I must quote it:—

"A familiar incident may render plain the manner in which a process of intellectual improvement, the *reverse of that which nature pursues*, is by reason introduced. There never perhaps existed a school-boy who, having, when he retired to rest, carelessly blown out his candle, and having chanced to notice, as he lay upon his bed in the ensuing darkness, the sullen light which had survived the extinguished flame, did not, at some time or other, watch that light as if his mind were bound to it by a spell. It fades and revives—gathers to a point—seems as if it would go out in a moment—again recovers its strength, nay becomes brighter than before: it continues to shine with an endurance, which in its apparent weakness is a mystery—it prŏtracts its existence so long, clinging to the power which supports it, that the observer, who had lain down in his bed so easy-minded, beeomes sad and melancholy: his sympathies are

touched—it is to him an intimation and an image of departing life; the thought comes nearer to him—it is the life of a venerated parent, of a beloved brother or sister, or of an aged domestic; who are gone to the grave, or whose destiny it soon may be thus to linger, thus to hang upon the last point of mortal existence, thus finally to depart and be seen no more. This is nature teaching seriously and sweetly through the affections; melting the heart, and through that instinct of tenderness, developing the understanding. In this instance the object of solicitude is the bodily life of another. Let us accompany this same boy to that period between youth and manhood, when a solicitude may be awakened for the moral life of himself. Are there any powers by which, beginning with a sense of inward decay, that affects not, however, the natural life, he could call to mind the same image, and hang over it with an equal interest as a visible type of his own perishing spirit? O, surely, if the being of the individual be under his own care; if it be his first care; if duty begin from the point of accountableness to our conscience, and through that, to God and human nature; if without such primary sense of duty, all secondary care of teacher, of friend or parent, must be baseless and fruitless; if, lastly, the motions of the soul transcend in worth those of the animal functions, nay give to them their sole value,—then truly are there such powers: and the image of the dying taper may be recalled and contemplated, though with no sadness in the nerves, no disposition to tears, no unconquerable sighs, *yet with a melancholy in the soul, a sinking inward into ourselves from thought to thought, a steady remonstrance, and a high resolve.* Let, then, the youth go back, as occasion will permit, to nature and to solitude, thus admonished by reason, and relying upon this newly-acquired support. A world of fresh sensations will gradually open upon him as his mind puts off its infirmities, and as, *instead of being propelled restlessly towards others in admiration, or too hasty love,* he makes it his prime business to understand himself. New sensations, I affirm, will be opened out—pure, and sanctioned by that reason which is their original author; and precious feelings of disinterested, that is, self-disregarding joy and love may be regenerated and restored: and, in this sense, he may be said to measure back the track of life he has trod."

One feels that the poet must live alone in order thus

consciously to bathe all that he touches with a new atmosphere not its own. We are most alone when we most distinctly feel the boundary-line between ourselves and the world beyond us. In acts of free-will the sense of human solitude is always at its height; for in them we distinguish *ourselves* from all things else. And in the world of imagination this spiritual freedom is especially remarkable. *There* one has always heard that freedom is not, that genius is undisputed master of the will. Wordsworth's poetry is the living refutation of this assertion. He is so solitary, because his spirit consciously directs his imagination, and imposes on it from within influences stronger than any it receives from without.

> "The outward shows of sky and earth,
> Of hill and valley, he has viewed;"

but

> "impulses of deeper birth
> Have come to him in solitude."[2]

Reverie is not, in this sense, solitary, and Wordsworth is not the poet of reverie. In reverie the mind wholly loses the boundaries of its own life, and wanders away unconsciously to the world's end. Wordsworth's musings are never reveries. He neither loses himself nor the centre of his thought. He carries his own spiritual world with him, draws the thing or thought or feeling on which he intends to write from its common orbit, fixes it, like a new star, in his own higher firmament, and there con-

[2] 'A Poet's Epitaph,' vol. v. of 'Wordsworth's Poems,' p. 24. (The seven-volume edition.)

templates it beneath the gleaming lights and mysterious shadows of its new sphere. It is in this respect that he differs so widely in habit of thought from Coleridge, who was also a muser in his way. All his thoughts in any one poem flow as surely from a distinct centre as the fragrance from a flower. With Coleridge they flit away down every new avenue of vague suggestion, till we are lost in the inextricable labyrinth of tangled associations. The same spiritual freedom which set Wordsworth's imagination in motion, also controlled and fixed it on a single focus. And this he himself noted in contrasting his own early mental life with his friend's abstract and vagrant habits of fancy :—

> "I had forms distinct
> To steady me; each airy thought revolved
> Round a substantial centre, which at once
> Incited it to motion and controlled.
> I did not pine like one in cities bred,
> As was thy melancholy lot, dear friend,
> Great spirit as thou art, in endless dreams
> Of sickliness, disjoining, joining, things
> Without the light of knowledge."[3]

That this hardy spiritual freedom, acting through the imagination, and drawing the object of the poet's contemplation voluntarily and purposely into his own world of thought, is the most distinguishing characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry, may be best verified by comparing him with any other of our great poets. All other poets

[3] 'Prelude,' book viii. p. 224.

create their poetry, and even their meditative poetry, in the act of throwing themselves *into* the life of the scene or train of thought or feeling they are contemplating: Wordsworth deliberately withdraws his imagination from the heart of his picture to contemplate it in its spiritual relations. Thus, for instance, Tennyson and Wordsworth start from the same mood, the one in the song 'Tears, idle tears,' the other in the poem called the 'Fountain.' Tennyson's exquisite poem is well known :—

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean;
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld;
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange, as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more."

Now turn to Wordsworth's treatment of the same theme :—

"My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred;
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard.

Thus fares it still in our decay;
And yet the wiser mind
Mourns less for what age takes away
Than what it leaves behind.

The blackbird amid leafy trees,
The lark above the hill,
Let loose their carols when they please,
Are quiet when they will.

With Nature never do they wage
A foolish strife; they see
A happy youth, and their old age
Is beautiful and free.

But we are pressed by heavy laws;
And often, glad no more,
We wear a face of joy because
We have been glad of yore."

Tennyson continues in the same strain of emotion with which he begins, picturing the profound unspeakable sadness with which we survey the irrecoverable past; Wordsworth no sooner touches the same theme than he checks the current of emotion, and, to use his own words, "instead of being restlessly propelled" by it, he makes it the object of contemplation, and, "with no unconquerable sighs, yet with a melancholy in the soul, sinks inward into himself, from thought to thought, to a steady remonstrance and a high resolve." And thus meditating, he wrings from the temporary sadness fresh

conviction that the ebbing away, both in spirit and in appearance, of the brightest past, sad as it must ever be, is not so sad a thing as the weak yearning which, in departing, it often leaves stranded on the soul, to cling to the appearance when the spirit is irrecoverably lost. There is no other great poet who thus redeems new ground for spiritual meditation from beneath the very sweep of the tides of the most engrossing affections, and quietly maintains it in possession of the musing intellect. There is no other but Wordsworth who has led us "to those sweet counsels *between head and heart*" which flash upon the absorbing emotions of the moment the steady light of a calm infinite world. None but Wordsworth has ever so completely transmuted by an imaginative spirit, unsatisfied yearnings into eternal truth. No other poet ever brought out as he has done

> "The soothing thoughts that spring
> Out of human suffering;"

or so tenderly preserved the

> "wall-flower scents
> From out the crumbling ruins of fallen pride;"

or taught us how,

> "By pain of heart, now checked, and now impelled,
> The intellectual power through words and things
> Went sounding on a dim and perilous way."

He has himself described this self-determination of his genius to "preserve and enlarge the *freedom in himself*" in lines so beautiful, that, though I have already lingered long on this point, I cannot forbear quoting them :—

"Within the soul a faculty abides
That, with interpositions which would hide
And darken, so can deal that they become
Contingencies of pomp, and serve to exalt
Her native brightness. As the ample moon,
In the deep stillness of a summer even,
Rising behind a thick and lofty grove,
Burns like an unconsuming fire of light
In the green trees; and, kindling on all sides
Their leafy umbrage, turns the dusky veil
Into a substance glorious as her own,
Yea with her own incorporated, by power
Capacious and serene. Like power abides
In man's celestial spirit; virtue thus
Sets forth and magnifies herself; thus feeds
A calm, a beautiful, and silent fire
From the encumbrances of mortal life,
From error, disappointment,—nay, from guilt;
And sometimes, so relenting justice wills,
From palpable oppressions of despair."[4]

Of other poets, Tennyson alone may seem in some of his more thoughtful poems (the 'In Memoriam' and 'The Two Voices') to have approached Wordsworth's domain in employing the spiritual imagination to illuminate the moods of human emotion. In reality, however, even these poems are quite distinct in kind. They are more like glittering sparks flying upwards from the flames of self-consuming aspirations than the quiet, stedfast, and spiritual lights of Wordsworth's insight.

But it is by no means principally in treating these deeper themes that Wordsworth brings the most of this conscious, voluntary, imaginative force to bear upon his

[4] 'Excursion,' book iv. p. 152.

subjects. All his most characteristic poems bear vivid traces of the same mental process. In his poems on subjects of natural beauty it is perhaps even more remarkable than in his treatment of mental subjects where this contemplative withdrawal from the immediate tyranny of a present emotion, in order to gain a higher point of view, seems more natural. But in all his most characteristic poems on nature there is just the same method; first, a subjection of the mind to the scene or object of feeling studied; then a withdrawing into his deeper self to exhaust its meaning. Thus, in the fine poems on Yarrow, the point of departure is the craving of the mind to see an object long ago painted in the imagination; but instead of yielding to the current of that feeling, the poet checks himself, and asks whether the imaginative anticipation may not in itself be a richer wealth than any reality which could take its place:—

"Let beeves and homebred kine partake
The sweets of Burn-mill meadow,
The swan on still St. Mary's Lake
Float double swan and shadow!
We will not see them, will not go
To-day, nor yet to-morrow:
Enough if in our hearts we know
There's such a place as Yarrow.

Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown!
It must, or we shall rue it;
We have a vision of our own,—
Ah, why should we undo it?
The treasured dreams of time long past,
We'll keep them, winsome Marrow;
For when we're there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow."

And in the same way, in the poem on "Yarrow visited," after brooding over its beauties, he puts them at a distance from him, to distinguish the influence of the "waking dream," "the image that hath perished," in helping him to see the reality: "I see, but not by sight alone, loved Yarrow, have I won thee." And then finally, in revisiting the same spot in old age, we have first the picture of the present; and, as the memory of the past, with its regrets, naturally follows, again the poet shakes himself free from this regret—the natural mood of the natural man, so to speak—in recognising the beauties of happier years, to win the higher spiritual insight that—

> "the visions of the past
> *Sustain* the heart in feeling
> Life as she is—our changeful life,
> With friends and kindred dealing."

And he ends this most perfect triad of spiritual imaginations with the characteristic verse,—

> "Flow on for ever, Yarrow stream,
> Fulfil thy pensive duty,
> Well pleased that future bards should chant
> For simple hearts thy beauty;
> To dream-light dear while yet unseen,
> Dear to the common sunshine,
> And dearer still, as now I feel,
> To memory's shadowy moonshine."

As more striking illustrations of the same poetic method —more striking simply because the subjects are apparently so purely descriptive that there would seem to be less room for this "sinking inward into himself from

thought to thought"—I may recall those daffodils transfigured before the "inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude;" the cuckoo, which, though "babbling only to the vale of sunshine and of flowers," he spiritualises into a "wandering voice," that "tellest unto me a tale of visionary hours;" the mountain echo, which sends her "unsolicited reply" to the same babbling wanderer; the nut-laden hazel-branches, whose luxuriant feast first threw him into "that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay tribute to ease," and which then so "patiently gave up their quiet being," that, haunted by remorse, he is compelled to exclaim, "with gentle hand touch, for there is a spirit in the woods;" the daisy, that recalls him from "stately passions" to "the homely sympathy that heeds the common life our nature breeds;" and the mists, which "magnify and spread the glories of the sun's bright head." But there is no finer instance of Wordsworth's self-withdrawing mood in gazing at external things than that of the lines on the Boy of Windermere who mocked the owls. For real lovers of Wordsworth, these lines have effected more in helping them adequately to imagine the full depth of the human imagination, and to feel the inexhaustible wealth of Nature's symbols, than any magnificence of storm or shipwreck or Alpine solitude:—

> "There was a boy: ye knew him well, ye cliffs
> And islands of Winander! many a time
> At evening, when the earliest stars began
> To move along the edges of the hills,

Rising or setting, would he stand alone
Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake;
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him; and they would shout
Across the watery vale and shout again,
Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
Of mirth and jocund din: and when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung
Listening, a *gentle shock of mild surprise*
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake."

No other poet but Wordsworth that the world ever produced could have written this; you feel in reading it that the lines "a gentle shock of mild surprise has carried *far into his heart* the voice of mountain torrents," had for him an exactness as well as a fulness of meaning;—for he shows a curious power of carefully discriminating the *degrees* of depth in his poetic imaginations; some lie near the surface; others lie deeper, but still within the sphere of less meditative minds; others spring from a depth far beyond the reach of any human soundings.

Again, the beauty of Wordsworth's little ballads is never properly understood by those who do not enter

into the contemplative tone in which they are written. There is none of them that can be approached in a mood of *sympathetic* emotion without failing to produce its full effect. 'Lucy Gray,' for example, is a continual disappointment to those who look for an expression of the piteousness and desolation of the lost child's fate.[5] Wordsworth did not feel it thus; he was contemplating a pure and lonely death as the natural completion of a pure and lonely life. He calls it not "Desolation," but "Solitude." He strikes the key-note of the poem in speaking of her in the first verse as "the solitary child," and then

> "No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;
> She dwelt on a wide moor,
> *The sweetest thing that ever grew*
> *Beside a human door.*"

Wordsworth's purpose evidently was to paint a perfectly lovely solitary flower snapped, for its very purity, in its earliest bud, that it might remain an image of solitary beauty for ever. He *intended* to dissolve away all pain and pity in the loveliness of the picture. It was not the lot of Lucy Gray, but the spiritualised meaning of that lot as it lived in his imagination, that he desired to paint. Again, in the exquisite ballad 'We are seven,' few discern how every touch throughout the whole is intended to heighten the contrast between the natural health and joy of life in the living child and the super-

[5] Such as Mr. Kingsley, for instance, has so finely given in his ballad on the girl lost on the sands of Dee.

natural secret of death. It is not a mere tale of one little cottage girl, who could not conceive the full meaning of death: it is the poet's contemplative contrast between the rosy beauty and buoyant joyousness of children's life and the "incommunicable" sleep, which is the subject of the poem. The perfect art with which this is effected is seldom adequately observed. He introduces the living child with a glimpse of the inward brightness that childish health and beauty breathe around them:—

> "She had a rustic woodland air,
> And she was wildly clad;
> Her hair was fair, and very fair:
> Her beauty made me glad."

And when he has drawn the picture of her eating her supper by the little graves of her brother and sister, that she may "sit and sing to them," he heightens the contrast yet more,—

> "The first that died was little Jane:
> In bed she moaning lay,
> Till God released her of her pain,
> And then she went away.
>
> So in the churchyard she was laid;
> And when the grass was dry,
> *Together round her grave we played,*
> My brother John and I.
>
> And when the ground was white with snow,
> *And I could run and slide,*
> My brother John was forced to go,
> And he lies by her side."

Simple as this language is, it is not the language in

which a child would have spoken. It is the language of a poet musing on the contrast between the little silent graves, changing with every season, freshening with the spring, wetted by the rain, and whitened by the winter's snow, like any other specks of common earth, and the buoyant child's unshaken fancy that they contain her sister and her brother still. So full is she of overflowing life herself, that though she can "run and slide," the whitened mounds still seem to her to hide a life as vivid as her own.

The voluntary element that I have noticed in Wordsworth's genius—the preference for checking obvious and natural currents of thought or feeling in order to brood over them meditatively and bring out a result of a higher order, leads to many of his imperfections as well as beauties. He had, as I have noticed, an eminently frugal mind. He liked of all things to make the most of the smaller subject before he gave himself up to the greater. The sober, sparing, free-will with which he gathers up the crumbs, and feeds his genius on them before he will break in on any whole loaf, is eminently characteristic of him. Emotion does not hurry him into poetry nor into anything else. He "slackens his thoughts *by choice*,"[6] when they grow eager; he defers his feast of nuts that he may first enjoy expectation to the full; he will wear out the luxury of his imaginations of Yarrow before he tries the reality; he is more willing by far to

[6] 'Prelude,' book i.

wait for the due seasons of poetry than the husbandman for the due seasons of fruit :—

> "His mind was keen,
> Intense, and frugal; apt for all affairs,
> And watchful more than ordinary men."[7]

The poem on the strawberry-blossom is right from the heart of his own nature :—

> "That is work of waste and ruin :
> Do as Charles and I are doing.
> Strawberry-blossoms one and all,
> We must spare them—here are many.
> Look at it, the flower is small—
> Small and low, but fair as any;
> Do not touch it—summers two
> I am older, Anne, than you.
> * * * * *
> Hither, soon as spring has fled,
> You and Charles and I will walk;
> Lurking berries ripe and red
> Then will hang on every stalk,
> Each within its leafy bower;
> And for that promise spare the flower."

And so Wordsworth himself would always have saved up his strawberry-blossoms of poetry till the "lurking berries ripe and red" lay in them, had he had the quick eye to distinguish surely between the unripe beauty and the ripe. But this he had not. As he himself tells us, he found it almost impossible to distinguish "a timorous capacity from prudence," "from circumspection, infinite delay." He had not that swiftness and fusion of nature

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[7] Michael.

which helps a man to distinguish at once the fruit of his lower from that of his higher moods. He gathered in

> "the harvest of a quiet eye,
> That broods and sleeps on its own heart,"

with undiscriminating frugality, gathering in often both tares and wheat. It was that same voluntary character of his imaginative life, which enabled him to give so new an aspect to his themes, which also rendered him unable to distinguish with any delicacy between the various moods in which he wrote. A poet who is the mere instrument, as it were, of his own impulses of genius, knows when the influence is upon him; but a poet whose visionary mood is always half-voluntary, and a result of a gradual withdrawing of the mind into its deeper self, cannot well have the same quick vision for the boundary between commonplace and living imagination which belongs to natures of more spontaneous genius. Wordsworth seems to kindle his own poetic flame like a blind man kindling his own fire; and often, as it were, he goes through the process of lighting it without observing that the fuel is damp and has not caught the spark; and thus, though he has left us many a beacon of pure and everlasting glory flaming from the hills, he has left us also many a monumental pile of fuel from which the poetic fire has early died away.

It is clear that Wordsworth as a poet did, as he tells us himself, "feel the weight of too much liberty." In his finest poem he declares—

> "Me this unchartered freedom tires,
> I feel the weight of chance desires."

And no doubt he had even too complete a mastery over himself. He could not distinguish the *arbitrary* in his poetry from the conscious conquests of insight. And being, as we have seen, most frugal—feeling, as he did, to the very last day of his poetic life, that it was the greatest of impieties to "tax high Heaven with prodigality,"[8] he made not only the most of these "chance desires" or suggestions, but often *more* than the most, using them as the pedestals to thoughts in reality far too broad for them. It is the great defect of Wordsworth's poems, that where he has to deal with *circumstance* at all, he either gives it in all its baldness, or makes his meditations *overhang* it, like the projecting stories of old-fashioned houses, in which the basement is more costly than the air, and therefore is husbanded more carefully. To him the basement of circumstance was very costly, and the superinduced contemplation as abundant as the former was costly. Coleridge has criticised this tendency in Wordsworth to spread out a dome of thought over very insufficient supports of fact, in accusing him of "thoughts and images too great for their subject." It is mistaken criticism, we think, to assert this, as Coleridge does, of any of his poems on Nature. The daisy and the daffodils breathed a buoyant joy and love into Wordsworth's simple nature which Coleridge could but half understand. The thoughts

[8] See the beautiful verses, "The unremitting voice of nightly streams," to which the date 1846 is attached.

were not too great for the real influences they are capable of exerting. But to his poems on *incident*, Coleridge's charge is often perfectly applicable. The following criticism, for instance, contains a fair illustration of this tendency to erect a meditative dome over an inadequate pedestal. We quote from Coleridge's 'Biographia Literaria':—

"The poet having gone out for a day's tour of pleasure, meets early in the morning with a knot of gipsies, who had pitched their blanket-tents and straw-beds, together with their children and asses, in some field by the road-side. At the close of the day, on his return, our tourist found them in the same place. 'Twelve hours,' says he,

> 'Twelve hours, twelve bounteous hours are gone, while I
> Have been a traveller under open sky,
> Much witnessing of change and cheer;
> Yet as I left I find them here.'

Whereat the poet, without seeming to reflect that the poor tawny wanderers might probably have been tramping for weeks together through road and lane, over moor and mountain, and consequently must have been right glad to rest themselves, their children, and cattle for one whole day; and overlooking the obvious truth, that such repose might be quite as necessary for them as a walk of the same continuance was pleasing or healthful for the more fortunate poet,—expresses his indignation in a series of lines, the diction and imagery of which would have been rather above than below the mark had they been applied to the immense empire of China, impregressive for thirty centuries :—

> 'The weary sun betook himself to rest:—
> Then issued Vesper from the fulgent west,
> Outshining like a visible god,
> The glorious path in which he trod.
> And now ascending after one dark hour,
> And one night's diminution of her power,
> Behold the mighty Moon! This way
> She looks, as if at them; but they
> Regard not her:—O, better wrong and strife,
> Better vain deeds or evil, than such life!
> The silent heavens have goings on;
> The stars have tasks;—but *these* have none.'"

There is no structural power in Wordsworth's mind. When he has to deal with things, influences, living unities, he is usually opulent and at ease; for the natural emanations which flowers and mountains and children and simple rustic natures breathe around them are homogeneous in themselves, and only ask a poet who will open his whole spirit to them with steady contemplative eye, and draw in their atmosphere. But when much incident enters into poetry, the poet also needs high combining power; he needs the art of rapidly changing his mental attitude, and yet keeping the same tone and mood throughout; and to this the voluntary, frugal, contemplative character of Wordsworth's intellectual nature is quite unequal. Wherever there is extended surface in his subject, there there is want of unity in the poem—inadequacy to blend a variety of elements into a single picture. There is no whole landscape in all Wordsworth's exquisite studies of nature. There is no variety of moral influences in all his many beautiful contemplations of character. There is no distinct centre of interest in any but his very simplest narratives. Indeed, he can deal with facts successfully only when they are simple enough to embody but a single idea: as in the case of Peter Bell and the Idiot Boy. If they have any character of *accident* about them, this reappears in his poems in all the accidental, discontinuous, and straggling form of its original existence. Almost any one of Wordsworth's fact-poems will immediately occur to the mind in illustration of this—'Simon

Lee,' 'Alice Fell,' the story of the traveller lost on Helvellyn, and many others. They are *anecdotes*, with passages often of surpassing beauty; but still untransmuted anecdotes,—here a bit of fact—there a gleam of natural loveliness—then a layer more of fact, and so forth. He neither throws himself into the narrative, so as to give you the active spirit of life inside it, as Scott did; nor does he give solely the contemplative view of it, as in his simplest ballads he can do with so much beauty; but he sprinkles a little macadam of stony fact along the fair upland path of his imagination. Thus, in the early editions of 'The Thorn,' he anxiously recorded the size of the infant's grave:—

> "I've measured it from side to side,
> 'Tis three feet long and two feet wide"

—inevitably suggesting that the poet was an undertaker calculating accurately the measure of the coffin.

Yet these spots of prosiness are eminently characteristic of Wordsworth. He had vividly acute senses, and delighted in the mere physical use of them; they both relieved him from the strain of contemplation, and suggested new food for contemplation. "I speak," he says in the Prelude,

> "in recollection of a time
> When the bodily eye—in every stage of life
> The most despotic of our senses—gained
> Such strength in *me*, as often held my mind
> In absolute dominion. . . . .
> I roam'd from hill to hill, from rock to rock,

> Still craving combination of new forms;
> New pleasure; wider empire for the sight,
> Proud of her own endowments; and *rejoiced*
> *To lay the inner faculties asleep.*"

The truth of this statement is obvious to any one who reads his earliest poems; and these vivid senses continued to the last to work quite in separation from the poetic spirit within him; so that no poet gives us so strong a feeling of the contrast between the inward and the outward as Wordsworth; he *dives* into himself between his respirations, that he may exclude for a little while the tyranny of the senses, and so not waste his life in the mere animal pleasure of breathing. A geometrician would say, that while most other poetry moves on the plane of life, Wordsworth's is poetry of double curvature, and winds in and out continually beneath and above it. One of Wordsworth's biographers states, that the sense of hearing was the finest sense Wordsworth had, and gave rise to the finest poetry of Nature he ever wrote. The latter statement is, I think, true; but the inference from it, that the ear was the finest of Wordsworth's senses, is probably an error. There is no indication that he had any fine faculty for music; and I think the reasoning by which it was inferred that he had, is probably almost an inversion of the truth. It is because the ear cannot and does not fill and distract the contemplative mind so much as the eye,—because sound appeals directly to the interpreting spirit, and has so little substantive significance of its own,—that Wordsworth's poetry on sounds has, per-

haps, less discontinuity, more fusion, than his poetry on sight. Vision absorbed him, and would not allow his "inward eye" to see until sight was exchanged for memory; and even then his poems on visible things have two distinct portions—the descriptive portion, or the strophe dedicated to the eye, and the meditative antistrophe, which belongs to the mind. But when he listened, the sound only served to keep his mind fixed on a single centre, while it allowed him full scope for free meditation. It was not easy for him to macadamise his poetry with little abrupt matter-of-fact sounds. There is no poem like that 'To the Cuckoo'—of all his poems Wordsworth's own darling. Whether "through water, earth, and air, the soul of happy sound was spread," or the "far-distant hills into the tumult sent an alien sound of melancholy not unnoticed," there was in Sound ever expression enough to stir the depths of Wordsworth's watchful heart without enslaving his senses.

But it is by no means due only to the imperfect unity between Wordsworth's spirit and senses, and his disposition to save up all he saw for his poetry just as he saw it, that these little constant specks of incongruous material so often annoy us; the same thing occurs almost as often in his meditative poems. There was a rigidity in his mind, the offspring probably of the intense meditation he was wont to concentrate on single centres of thought. Hazlitt has thus finely described the general expression of his personal appearance:—

"The next day Wordsworth arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's

cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don-Quixote like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian-jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge, in his gait, not unlike his own Peter Bell. There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense high narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. Chantrey's bust wants the marking traits; but he was teased into making it regular and heavy. Haydon's head of him, introduced into the *Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem*, is the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down, and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine."

Clearly in Wordsworth, as well as in Peter Bell, there were many of

> "The unshaped half-human thoughts
> Which solitary nature feeds
> 'Mid summer storms or winter's ice."

One half applies to him that fine verse—

> "There was a hardness in his cheek,
> There was a hardness in his eye,
> As though the man had fixed his face
> In many a solitary place
> Against the wind and open sky."

Indeed, he expressly tells us that this tendency to hardness was the leaning of his mind; but that he had been led to more delicate and sensitive thoughts by his sister's influence—

> "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
> And humble cares, and delicate fears;
> A heart the fountain of sweet tears,
> And love, and thought, and joy."

The natural rigidity of his mind was great, and hence, probably, his great deficiency in humour, which cannot exist without a certain flexibility of both feeling and thought, allowing of rapid transitions from one point of view to another. It was not only that he had "fixed his face in many a solitary place, against the wind and open sky," but in the intellectual spaces it was the same. Against the infinite solitudes of the eternal world he had intently fixed his spirit, till it too had something of the rigid attitude of the mystic, and was crossed at times by the dark spots which constant gazing at a great brightness will always produce. He paid for the frequency of

> "that blessed mood
> In which the burden of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world
> Is lightened—that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood,
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul;
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things"—

—he paid for the frequency of this mood by a want of ease and delicacy in the lesser movements of his intellectual nature, which rendered him often unable to bring

the minutiæ even of his finest poems into harmony with their spirit. Thus he often mistook the commonplace observations of his superficial understanding for the deeper thoughts of his heart; he had no living feeling that told him when he was dividing things with the blunt edge of common sense, and when he was wielding that fine sword of the imagination by which to the discerning eye the poet divides asunder soul and spirit as surely as that greater sword divides for judgment. He would rise and fall in the same poem from clear vision to the obscure gropings of common sense—from obscure gropings to clear vision—and not feel the incongruity. No one can help shrinking at the sudden discord, when, in the lovely poem, "She was a phantom of delight," we read—

> "And now I see with eyes serene
> The very pulse of the *machine*,
> A being breathing thoughtful breath,
> A traveller between life and death."

It is a jar to the mind, like coming down three steps without notice, to stumble over this "machine" in the midst of such a poem; you think of an automaton at once, or of Madame Tussaud's breathing figure. There are numbers of gritty little poems completely written in this machine-mood; but the trial is severe when such a crag starts up to bruise you in the midst of perfect loveliness. We should not grumble if that "worthy short-lived youth" commemorated in one of his sonnets, had been thus spoken of as a superseded mechanism; but

that "a dancing shape, an image gay," should be associated with any notion of the kind, suggests a meaning for the exquisite line "to haunt, to startle, and waylay," the farthest possible, we should imagine, from the mind of the poet in writing it.

Many of these small discords which interrupt the harmony of Wordsworth's poetry are due to the egotism by which a man of moods so solitary and of genius so decisive was almost necessarily haunted. The smallest memoranda of his own mind or life he will often preserve in his poetry, with a kind of blind faith that they have a universal meaning. Thus, in one of his sonnets, he tells us elaborately how he gazed one day at the sea, and saw many ships, and his mind gradually began to take a particular interest in one of them, and how this one sailed northwards. One of his most thoughtful admirers suggested that this sonnet was perhaps trivial; but Wordsworth confuted her in a long letter, in which he proved that the sonnet was a poetic illustration of a universal law of mind, by virtue of which man must either find or make a unity in all that he contemplates; and if there be no determining reason, then the "liberty of indifference," as the metaphysicians call it, will come into play, and he will select a unit of thought arbitrarily, as the poet here chose for special interest a special ship, of which he truly observes, that she "was naught to me, nor I to her." "I must say," says Wordsworth of this gently remonstrant admirer, "that even she has something yet to receive from me. I say

this with confidence, from her thinking that I have fallen below myself in the sonnet beginning, 'With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh.'" It might be replied, perhaps, that the same reasoning would prove him to be justified in using poetry to illustrate the simple conversion of propositions, or in writing a touching sonnet on the "Illicit process of the Major." The best and even the most poetical defence we can make for such caprices is, that they are venial egotisms; for it is certainly more poetic to exhibit life—even egotistic life—in any fashion, than to illustrate merely *formal* laws. I should not have alluded to this at all, but that Hazlitt has set up a theory, founded in some measure perhaps, on these little personal egotisms, to prove that Wordsworth's poetic power is born of egotism, and is part and parcel of his complete *want* of universality.

"Mr. Wordsworth is the last man to 'look abroad into universality,' if that alone constituted genius: he looks at home into himself, and is 'content with riches fineless.' He would in the other case be 'poor as winter,' if he had nothing but general capacity to trust to. He is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he is the greatest egotist. He is 'self-involved, not dark.' He sits in the centre of his own being, and there 'enjoys bright day.' He does not waste a thought on others. Whatever does not relate exclusively and wholly to himself, is foreign to his views. He contemplates a whole-length figure of himself, he looks along the unbroken line of his personal identity. He thrusts aside all other objects, all other interests, with scorn and impatience, that he may repose on his own being; that he may dig out the treasures of thought contained in it; that he may unfold the precious stores of a mind for ever brooding over itself. His genius is the effect of his individual character. He stamps that character—that deep individual interest—on whatever he meets. The object

is nothing but as it furnishes food for internal mediation, for old associations. If there had been no other being in the universe, Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would have been just what it is. . . . . With a mind averse from outward objects, but ever intent upon its own workings, he hangs a weight of thought and feeling upon every trifling circumstance connected with his past history. The note of the cuckoo sounds in his ear like the voice of other years; the daisy spreads its leaves in the rays of boyish delight that stream from his thoughtful eyes; the rainbow lifts its proud arch in heaven but to mark his progress from infancy to manhood; an old thorn is buried, bowed down under the mass of associations he has wound about it; and to him, as he himself beautifully says,

> 'The meanest flow'r that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'"

Hazlitt's malicious genius delighted in this kind of thorny praise. His criticisms are generally full of insight; and come short of the truth mainly from the deep scepticism which always leaves him perfectly contented with his own paradox. He has no conviction that apparent paradox is not real. He is quite willing to believe that mere egotism can be the root of genius or of any thing else that is noble, and is not driven back to his facts by any aversion to so startling a conclusion. He tells us further on, that Wordsworth's "strength, as it often happens, arises from excess of weakness." This is but the sceptic's bitter version of the truth, that "weakness constantly arises from excess of strength;" a form of the proposition not only more true in itself, but far more applicable to Wordsworth's poetry. Rare gifts of mind almost always tend to some overbalance of habit, or thought, or feeling—to some narrowness, pride, or humour, that is in itself a weakness. But no weakness

ever *of itself* tends to an opposite strength, even though, as Wordsworth so finely observes in a passage I have already quoted, the free and voluntary wisdom of man may transmute it into an occasion for developing the highest strength; but this is through the supernatural life, not through any natural gravitation of weakness towards its opposite. Strong affections may tend to feebleness of purpose, but not feebleness of purpose to strong affections. Great contemplative power will tend to self-occupation, but self-occupation does not tend to contemplative power. Hazlitt saw that the egotism and the genius in Wordsworth were closely related, and with half-malicious pleasure hastily assumed that the worse quality had the deeper root. When he says that Wordsworth's poetry is mainly derived from "looking at home into himself," he says what I have all along endeavoured to establish; but when he *means* by this the contradictory of "looking abroad into universality," he is certainly and wilfully wrong. There are two selfs in every man—the private and the universal;—the source of personal crotchets, and the humanity that is our bond with our fellow-men, and gives us our influence over them. Half Wordsworth's weakness springs from the egotistical self, as he himself applies when he says,

> "Or is it that when human souls a journey long have had,
> And are returned into themselves, they cannot but be sad?"[9]

But all his power springs from the universal self. Nor is

[9] Star-gazers,—'Poetical Works,' vol. ii.

it in the least true that Wordsworth's finest poems, as Hazlitt implies, are cocoons of arbitrary personal associations, spun around local and accidental centres. The worst element in Wordsworth is the arbitrary and occasional element. Freedom, indeed, enters into his very finest poems,—but thoughtful, not arbitrary freedom: he draws us out of the natural currents of thought and emotion: but if it be from "chance desires," if it be to have us "all to himself," and give us an egotistic lecture in his own little study,—he is as far as possible from his true poetic mood.

It is in order to put us into communication with a part of his nature which has a feebler counterpart in ourselves,—to give us the joy of feeling latent intellectual powers quickened into conscious energy,—that, in his finer poems, he gently intrudes upon us his own higher imaginative life. It is an egotism, no doubt, when he ends a fine poem with the verse—

> "Matthew is in his grave; yet now
> Methinks I see him stand,
> As at that moment, with a bough
> Of wilding in his hand."

But it is not an egotism to tell us, as he does in the Prelude—

> "O, when I have hung
> Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
> And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock,
> But ill-sustained, and almost (so it seemed [1])

[1] Unless, indeed, this pedantic accuracy as to insignificant fact (not unusual in Wordsworth) be an egotism.

> Suspended by the blast that blew amain,
> Shouldering the naked crag,—O, at that time,
> While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
> With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
> Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
> Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!"

The difference lies in this, that in the former case the statement is a bare individual experience—which adds nothing to the living expression of the poem—the bough of "wilding" being entirely an "accidental grace"—while the whole verse breaks the unity of the subject by its abrupt transition to a different period and point of view; whereas the latter, though also a personal memory, paints to the very life that fresh wonder which the excitement of a little physical danger will spread for any watching eye over the whole face of heaven and earth. There is no egotism or caprice in delineating personal experience that helps to widen or renew the whole experience of others. Wordsworth was much excited on one occasion, at being told he had written a poem on "*a* daisy." "No," he said, "it was on *the* daisy—a very different thing." There *was* a difference, and it was a difference characteristic of his best poetry. His finest mood never descends to local or personal accidents alien to the experience or imagination of his readers. Coleridge truly says in one of his lectures, that Shakespeare never copied a character from a mere individual—never painted a unique character at all; each of his characters might represent a whole class; and so too, in his very different world, all Wordsworth's higher poems have a

certain breadth of life and influence, without any of the abstractness which, in inferior poets, accompanies breadth.

In what then, may one say, in answer to Hazlitt's criticism, that Wordsworth's universality consists, if high universal intelligence is to be found in his poems? Not in any power of elaborating what is usually understood by universal Truth: indeed, for so contemplative a poet, there is singularly little of the comprehensive grasp of Reason in his mind. Still less in any remarkable power of expressing universal emotions, though Hazlitt does regard him as essentially lyrical. His especial poetic faculty lies, I think, in contemplatively seizing the characteristic individual *influences* which all living things, from the very smallest of earth or air up to man and the Spirit of God, radiate around them to every mind that will surrender itself to their expressive power. It is not true that Wordsworth's genius lay mainly in the region of *mere* Nature;—rather say it lay in detecting Nature's influences just at the point where they were stealing unobserved into the very essence of the human soul. Nor is this all. His characteristic power lay no less in discovering divine influences, as they fall like dew upon the spirit. One may say that Wordsworth's poetry is fed on sympathy *less*, and on influences from *natures differing in kind* from his own *more*, than any other poetry in the world; and that he delineates these influences just as they are entering into the very substance of humanity. Strike out the human element from

his Nature poems, and they lose all their meaning: he did not paint Nature, like Tennyson; he arrested and interpreted its *spiritual expressions.* He regarded other men chiefly as natural influences acting on himself; but he never was inclined to identify Nature with either Man or God; for freedom, immortality, and a spiritual God were of the very essence of his own meditative world. He is not specifically the poet of Nature, nor the poet of Man, nor the poet of Truth, nor the poet of Religion; he is the poet of all separate *living emanations* from Nature, or from Man or God. Contemplative as he is, his mind was too concentrated and intense for general Truth. He fixed his imagination and his life too entirely and intensely on single centres of influence. He could not pass from the one to the other, and grasp many at once, so as to discern their mutual *relations,* in the discrimination of which Truth consists. He kept to single influences: solitary contemplative communion with all forms of life which did not disturb the contemplative freedom of his spirit, was his strength. His genius was universal, but was not comprehensive; it did not hold many things, but it held much. You see this especially in his larger poems: he is like one of his own "bees that murmur by the hour in foxglove-bells." He cannot move gradually through a train of thought or a consecutive narrative. He flies from bell to bell, and sucks all the honey deliberately out of each. Hence he was so fond of the sonnet, because it was just suited to embody one thought; yet it seldom exhausted for him one sub-

ject, and there is often an injury to his genius in the transition from sonnet to sonnet when he wrote a series on one theme. His "plain imagination and severe," as he himself called it, isolated whatever it dealt with, brought it into immediate contact with his own spirit, and so drew from it slowly and patiently every drop of sweet or sad or stern influence that it had the power to give off. But it is with him consciously *influence*, and influence only. He never humanises the spirits of natural objects, as Shelley did. He puts no fairy into the flower,—no dryad into the tree,—no nymph into the river;—he is too much of a realist for that, and he has far too intense a consciousness of the simple magnificence of moral freedom. Indeed he has too strict a *human* centre of contemplation for that to be possible. He regards Nature as a tributary to Man, sending him influences and emanations which pass into the very essence of his life, but never constitute that life. These influences are not like in *kind* to humanity. To liken them to higher beings is but to find "loose types of things through all degrees;" and when he addresses the river thus—

> "O glide, fair stream, for ever glide,
> *Thy quiet soul on all bestowing*,
> Till all our minds for ever flow
> As thy deep waters now are flowing,"

there is not even a momentary attempt to abstract from the visible water, and bestow a human "soul" upon the river;—he only gathers up the spiritual influences which emanate from it into a living centre, just as he elsewhere

spreads abroad the "soul of happy sound" through earth and air. He has the deepest conviction that different objects and scenes do radiate specific influences of their own, not dependent merely on the mood of the contemplative observer :—

> "Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,
> His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

But these radiated influences are never human till they touch the human soul, and are transmuted by that touch. Rich and almost infinite streams of power and beauty Nature does pour into Man ; but first when they reach that free and solitary spirit which draws down other and higher influences to meet them from God, do they fulfil their simple destiny. If any one chooses to deny that there is an absolute reality in the expressions of Nature to human minds,—that they are something as unalterable as the meaning of a smile or a frown,—he may and must say with Hazlitt that Wordsworth "never looks abroad into universality," but overwhelms natural objects with the weight of his own arbitrary associations. If the dancing daffodils are no real image of simple joy,—if the "power of hills" be a vague and misleading metaphor,—if the "welcome snow-drop"—

> "That child of winter, prompting thoughts that climb
> From desolation towards the genial prime"—

can tell no true tale of immortality to the simple-hearted

when sinking beneath the snows of age; if it be a mere confusion of ideas for a poet to believe

> "That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song;
> And from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
> *That flowed along my dreams;*"

if there be nothing ghostly in the yew-tree, no "witchery" in the sky, and no eternal voices in the sea; if, in a word, "the invisible things of Him from the creation" are *not* "clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,"—then indeed was Wordsworth "vain in his imagination," and "his foolish heart was darkened."

But Wordsworth did not doubt about these things; he *knew* them; and he knew too well the kind of human character they served to make or mar. His own nature was of this primitive humanity:—

> "Long have I loved what I behold—
> The night that calms, the day that cheers;
> The common growth of mother earth
> Suffices me—her tears her mirth,
> Her humblest mirth and tears."

He knew how these simple influences could not be received into the heart without receiving also

> "a spirit strong,
> That gives to all the selfsame bent
> Where life is wise and innocent;"

ke knew that no heart which "watches and receives" what quiet Nature gives, can have any of the preoccupying restlessness which evil brings; he knew that he

"Who affronts the eye of solitude, shall learn'
That her mild nature can be terrible."

And thus we have a set of characters of simple grain, all of them fed by the life of Nature, but all religious, spiritual and free,—in Michael, the Leech-gatherer, and the Wanderer in 'The Excursion;' while we have Peter Bell, and, in part, the Solitary, on the other hand, whose personal strength had been spent in "affronting the eye of solitude."

The result of almost all Wordsworth's universal experience of the influences of Nature acting *alone* on man is gathered up into his three poems, 'Lucy,' 'Ruth,' and 'The Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle' (the last, perhaps, the most perfect effort of his genius): the first containing his conception of the plastic influences of Nature in moulding us into beauty; the second, of her exciting spells for awakening the passions; the last, of her tranquillising influences on thought. If we take with these the poem on the lonely Leech-gatherer, in which he contrasts the instinctive joy and life of Nature with the burden of human free-will; the great 'Qde on Immortality,' in which he brings natural life into contrast with the supernatural, speaking of "those high instincts before which our mortal nature doth tremble like a guilty thing surprised;" and finally, the lines in which he draws together Nature, free-will, and God into one of the sublimest poems of our language, the 'Ode to Duty,' —we have in essence nearly all the truth that Wordsworth anxiously gleaned from a life of severe meditation,

though a very slight epitome indeed of the innumerable living influences from which that truth was learned. If any one doubts the real affinity between the expressions written on the face of Nature and those human expressions which so early interpret themselves to even infants that to account for them except as a natural language seems impossible, the exquisite poem on 'Lucy' ought to convert him. The contrast it illustrates between Wordsworth's faith in real emanations from all living or unliving "mute insensate" things, and the humanised "spirits" of life in the Greek mythological poetry, is very striking. Influences come from all these living objects, but personified influences never.

"Three years she grew in sun and shower;
Then Nature said, 'A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown.
This child I to myself will take,
She shall be mine, and I will make
A lady of my own.

Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse; and with me
The girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

The floating clouds their state shall lend.
To her; for her the willows bend:
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motion of the storm
Grace that shall mould the maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round;
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height—
Her virgin bosom swell:
These thoughts to Lucy I will give,
When she and I together live
Here in this happy dell.'

Thus Nature spake—the work was done.
How soon my Lucy's race was run!
She died; and left to me
This heath, this calm and quiet scene,
This memory of what hath been
And never more will be."

Of the poetry of Wordsworth, that cannot, perhaps ever be said which Wordsworth truly said of Burns, that "deep in the general heart of man his power survives;" for *his* is the poetry of solitude, and the "general heart of man" cannot bear to be alone. But there are some solitudes that cannot be evaded.

"Amid the groves, under the shaddwy hills
The generations are prepared; the pangs,
The internal pangs, are ready—the dread strife
Of poor humanity's afflicted will,"—

—and then we leave the greatest poets of the great world, and look to one who was ever glad to gaze into the deepest depths of his own heart, of Nature, and of God. "The pangs, the internal pangs," were not ready for *him*. "Bright, solemn, and serene," perhaps he alone, of all the great men of that day, had seen the light of the countenance of God shining clear into the face of Duty:—

"Stern Lawgiver! Yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face.
Flowers laugh before thee in their beds:
And fragrance in thy footing treads.
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient Heavens through thee are fresh and strong."

And therefore in his poems there will ever be a spring of something even fresher than poetic life—a pure, deep well of solitary joy.

III.

SHELLEY'S POETICAL MYSTICISM.[1]

SHELLEY was a poetical mystic, but a poetical mystic of a very unique kind. Usually the word denotes a tendency to bore deep into the world of divine Infinitude, a disposition to prostrate the mind before the Eternal Will, and to bring the mysteries of faith close to the simplest acts of daily life. This is not only the common tendency of the religious mystics, but it was the characteristic of some of Shelley's own contemporaries: in philosophy, of Coleridge; in poetry, of Wordsworth. In this sense, however, mysticism is usually the characteristic of a mature, not of a youthful,

[1] 'Memorials of Shelley.' By Lady Shelley. Moxon, 1859.
'Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron.' By E. J. Trelawny. Moxon, 1858.
'The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley.' By Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Vols. I. and II. Moxon, 1858.

mind; and Shelley's poetical mysticism is,—in the quick throb of its pulses, in the flush and glow of its hectic beauty, in the thrill of its exquisite anguish, and equally exquisite delirium of imagined bliss,—essentially and to the last the mysticism of intellectual youth. His poetry is the poetry of desire. He is ever the *homo desideriorum;*—always thirsty, always yearning; never pouring forth the strains of a thankful satisfaction, but either the cravings of an expectant rapture, or the agony of a severed nerve. This is the great distinction which separates him from the other poetical mystics of his day. Wordsworth, for instance, is always exulting in the fulness of nature; Shelley always chasing its falling stars. Wordsworth gratefully pierces the homely crust of earth to find the rich fountains of life in the Eternal Mind; Shelley follows with wistful eye the fleeting stream of beauty as it for ever escapes him into the illimitable void. Hence Shelley's great admiration for Goethe's 'Faust,' as a poem expressive of illimitable desires. He says, in one of his letters to Mr. Gisborne, that "it deepens the gloom, and augments the rapidity of ideas;" "and yet," he adds, "the pleasure of sympathising with emotions known only to few, although they derive their sole charm from despair, and the scorn of the narrow good we can attain in our present state, seems more than to ease the pain which belongs to them. Perhaps all discontent with the *less* (to use a Platonic sophism) supposes the sense of a just claim to the *greater*, and that we admirers of 'Faust' are on the right

road to Paradise. Such a supposition is not more absurd, and is certainly less demoniacal, than that of Wordsworth, where he says :—

'This earth,
Which is the world of all of us, and where
We find our happiness, or not at all.'

As if, after sixty years' suffering here, we were to be roasted alive for sixty million more in Hell, or charitably annihilated by a *coup-de-grace* of the bungler who brought us into existence at first." This passage, written not in Shelley's earlier days, but within a few months of his death, when he was thirty years of age, brings out with striking force, in its utter blindness to Wordsworth's meaning, how impossible it was for the eager-souled poet of unsatisfied desire—the poet of perpetual flux and reflux, the Heraclitus of the modern world—to enter into the mind of the poet of intellectual rest and "lonely rapture." Of course Wordsworth had no such theological meaning as Shelley indicates. He merely intended to affirm, that if the springs of infinite joy are not to some extent discoverable in man *here*, as he was sure that they were, they can scarcely be inherent in human nature at all, and therefore not in the world to come. But it was so impossible for Shelley to conceive any fulness of joy in the present world, that he supposed Wordsworth to be launching a thunderbolt against the school of the Unsatisfied,—the school who sang with himself,—

"Nor was there aught
The world contains the which he could approve,"—

when he was in fact only testifying to the spiritual opulence of this homely earth. The same extraordinary contrast comes out in two of the most beautiful poems which our language contains,—Shelley's 'Skylark' and Wordsworth's 'Skylark.' Shelley's 'Skylark' is a symbol of illimitable thirst drinking in illimitable sweetness,—an image of that rapture which no man can ever reach, because it soars so far from earth, because it is ever rising with unflagging wing, ever exhausting old delights. Shelley will not recognise its earthly form or abode at all; it is not a bird whose nest is on the ground; it is a winged desire, always rising, aspiring, singing, "like an unbodied joy, whose race is just begun:"—

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit,—
Bird thou never wert,—
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still, and higher,
From the earth thou springest;
Like a cloud of fire
The blue deep thou wingest;
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
Thou dost float and run,
Like an unbodied joy, whose race is just begun."[2]

[2] Mr. Rosetti, in his edition, adopts Professor Craik's amendment of "embodied" for "unbodied joy." It seems to me a most unauthentic change. Shelley was intending to suggest that the skylark

Yet even this symbol of a thirst ever new, and ever slaked from sweeter fountains, throws him into utter dejection before this most marvellous of English lyrics closes :—

"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;—
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

"Yet if we could scorn
Hate and pride and fear,
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever could come near."

How strong is the contrast with Wordsworth's 'Skylark'! Shelley's is far the more wonderful poem, for the quick pulses of his panting measure seem to give us the very beats of those quivering wings, while Wordsworth's stately lines are obviously the expression of the thoughts of a meditative watcher. But while Shelley has ignored the earth and the real bird altogether in his ideal flight, the firm grasp of Wordsworth's thought gives the green earth her due share in the "ethereal minstrel's" rapture, and bids us observe, that it is not the distance from earth, but the nearness to it, which inspires the celestial joy :—

"To the last point of vision and beyond
Soar, daring warbler; thy love-prompted strain,
'Twixt thee and thine a never-failing bond,

---

represented in its fire and music the upward flight of a joy that had just got rid of the fetters of a body.

> Thrills not the less the bosom of the plain.
> Else might'st thou seem—proud privilege—to sing
> All independent of the leafy spring."

It was Wordsworth's lifelong faith that fidelity to the "kindred points of heaven and home" made both earth the more joyous, and heaven the more sublime. Shelley's was a different creed, the creed of longing and of loss, which sought to spring from earth and to create its own heaven,—in which it is not easy to succeed.

Shelley, then, was essentially the poet of intellectual desire, not of mere emotion. The thrill of some fugitive feeling, which he is either vainly pursuing, or which has just slipped through his faint intellectual grasp, gives the key-note to every one of his finest poems. His wonderful description of the Hours in the *Prometheus Unbound*,—one of the few passages in which Shelley has given a great subject to any painter capable of entering into him,—is a description in fact of the two poetic attitudes of his own mind :—

> "The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
> I see cars drawn by rainbow-wingèd steeds,
> Which trample the dim winds ; in each there stands
> A wild-eyed charioteer urging their flight.
> Some look behind as fiends pursued them there,
> And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars;
> Others with burning eyes lean forth, and drink
> With eager lips the wind of their own speed,
> As if the thing they loved fled on before,
> And now, even now, they clasped it. Their bright locks
> Stream like a comet's flashing hair : they all
> Sweep onward."

As it seems to me, Shelley himself, in one of his

moods of wild-eyed breathless inspiration,—"l'Inglese malincolico," as the poor people called him at Florence, —leaning passionately forward into the future or backwards to the past, should be the impersonation of these spirit-charioteers of time. Eager, visionary, flashing forms, "drinking the wind of their own speed," they are wonderful impersonations of his most characteristic poetic moods. If we look at any of the lyrics on which he has set the full stamp of his genius, we find that it images one of these two attitudes of intellect,—the keen exquisite sense of want, gazing wildly forward or wildly backward, but vainly striving to close on something which eludes its grasp.

> "The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion of something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow,"

that is the true burden of every song. Sometimes the gaze is fixed on the future, and sometimes on the past; sometimes it is,

> "Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,
> Spirit of Night!
> Out of the misty eastern cave,
> Where all the long and lone daylight
> Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,
> Which make thee terrible and dear,—
> Swift be thy flight!"

and sometimes,

> "When the lamp is shattered,
> The light in the dust lies dead;
> When the cloud is scattered,
> The rainbow's glory is shed;

When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remembered not;
When the lips have spoken.
Loved accents are soon forgot;"

but whether forward or backward gazing, the attitude of unsatisfied desire is always the same, distinguishing Shelley from the many great contemporaries who, like Goethe himself, for instance,—except in 'Faust,' where he had set himself to delineate the pangs of an insatiable heart and intellect,—sing out of the wealth of happy possession even more melodiously than out of the gnawing ardour of desire. And even between the animating spirit of 'Faust' and the poetical moods of Shelley's poetry there is one very marked distinction. Faust's passion is a hunger for experience,—human experience in the largest and most universal sense; but the thirst which breathes through Shelley is a continual thirst for those rare moments of tingling veins and flushing soul, those instants when the whole frame of nature and human life seems a transparency for sweet emotion, which are but one element in Faust's pursuit. What the passages in 'Faust' were which fascinated Shelley most intensely he himself may tell us. Speaking of some fine German etchings of 'Faust,' he says:—"I never perfectly understood the Hartz Mountain scene until I saw the etching; and then Margaret in the summer-house with Faust! The artist makes one envy his happiness that he can sketch such things with calmness, which I only dared look upon once, and which

made my brain swim round only to touch the leaf on the opposite side of which I knew that it was figured." This is of the very essence of Shelley. He is the poet, not of human yearning in general, but of the yearning for that youthful ecstasy which bounds like fresh life through every nerve. He cannot be satisfied without a *thrill* of his whole soul. He knows nothing of serene joy. He thinks the whole universe should be ever thrilling in every fibre with mysterious tenderness. The nature of this thirst cannot be better described than in his own musical words:—

"With a spirit . . . trembling and feeble through its tenderness, I have every where sought, and have found only repulse and disappointment. Thou demandest, What is love? If we reason, we would be understood: if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's: if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own,—that the beams of her eyes should kindle at once, and mix and melt into our own,—that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best food. This is love;—this is the bond and the sanction which connects not only the two sexes, but every thing that exists.

"We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant we live and move, thirsts after its likeness. This propensity develops itself with the development of our nature—to this eagerly refers all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it. The discovery of its antitype—the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own—an imagination which can enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret—with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibration of our own—and of a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands,—this is the invisible and unattainable point to

which love tends ; and to attain which it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that without which there is no rest or respite to the heart over which it rules. Hence, in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings, and yet they sympathise not with us, we love the flowers, and the grass, and the waters, and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring—in the blue air, there is found a secret correspondence with our heart that awakens the spirits to a dance of breathless rapture, and brings tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone. Sterne says, that, if he were in a desert, he would love some cypress. So soon as this want of power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere wreck of what he was."

It is this constant longing to have ever sweet pulsations of feeling coursing through a transparent organism of life and nature which constitutes the "lyrical cry," as Mr. Arnold has so admirably termed the distinguishing note of lyrical poetry, in Shelley's poems. Sometimes, after a long strain on the nerves of intellectual desire, the cry rises almost to a shriek, as, for instance, in the closing lines of 'Epipsychidion :'—

> "Woe is me !
> The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
> Into the height of love's rare Universe,
> Are chains of lead around its flight of fire ;
> I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire !"

And his most characteristic poem, 'Alastor,' is a mere picture of a mind pierced with sweet susceptibilities, rushing in mad pursuit of some empty vision of the night, that has set those susceptibilities throbbing with liquid fire. "Quærebam quid amarem, amans amare," is the motto that he takes for it from St. Augustine. Other lyrical

poets write of what they feel, but Shelley almost uniformly of what he *wants* to feel. The source of his idealism and mysticism lies in this constant protest against the manifold dross of an opaque life, through the thick film of which he could not discern—nay, could not well imagine that he discerned—any sweet fountains of warm life.

And Shelley's idealism betrays its genuineness in the sorrowful wail, the even hoarsely discordant note, which frequently rings through it. A true idealist necessarily becomes restless as he leaves the earth and finds that he is getting into a drearier and colder atmosphere. There is a kind of faith or quietism, the very opposite of proper idealism, which is sometimes confounded with it because it is always finding, like Platonism, that earth is full of the thoughts of God. Shelley thought himself a Platonist, but with the least possible insight into Plato's true faith. In that constant yearning which he felt for a tingling thrill of new intellectual life, there was at times, as there is in all profound love of excitement, a jarring nerve, a thread of discord, which even reflected itself in his general demeanour, as all craving for excitement is apt to do. Hazlitt, keenest of observers, describes him as having the general *physique* of a fanatic. He had "a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine-complexioned and shrill-voiced." Mr. Hogg, too, tells us that the voice, which in poets at least is apt to denote some quality profoundly

rooted in the character,[3] was "of the most cruel intension; it was perpetual and without any remission,—*it excoriated the ears.*" And Shelley was quite aware of this hectic fever in his own nature. In one of his latest letters he writes to Mr. Gisborne: "As to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in these articles; and you might as well go to a ginshop for a leg of mutton as expect any thing human or earthly from me." There were many of his contemporaries whose poetry had infinitely more in it of mere stimulant than Shelley's; for the excitement he craved was of a highly distilled intellectual kind, a stimulant for the finest sensibilities—never for the mere senses. What he loves to feel is a new quiver through his soul,—a quiver of delicious flame, if it may be, but a shiver of horror, if it may not. The high treble key of Shelley's poetry is sometimes a cry of yearning; but sometimes also a cry of ghastly dread at

[3] Compare Hazlitt's description of Coleridge and Wordsworth's voices, both of them most expressive of their poetic character. "When I got there," Hazlitt says, "the organ was playing the Hundreth Psalm; and when it was done, Mr. Coleridge rose and gave out his text: 'And he went up into the mountain to pray, himself *alone*.' As he gave out this text, his voice rose like a stream of rich distilled perfumes; and when he came to the two last words, which he pronounced loud, deep, and distinct, it seemed to me, who was then young, as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and as if that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe." Wordsworth, says the same close observer, "sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the Northern burr, like the crust on wine."—From *My First Acquaintance with Poets.*

a spectre raised by himself. His early poems especially are full of "wormy" horrors; and the loathsomeness of the incident on which the plot of the 'Cenci' turns, evidently had a dreadful fascination for him. Mr. Hogg tells a playful little story of Shelley's vegetarian days, which reflects this side of his nature:—

"He broke a quantity, often, indeed, a surprising quantity, of bread into a large basin, and poured boiling water upon it. When the bread had been steeped awhile and had swelled sufficiently, he poured off the water, squeezing it out of the bread, which he chopped up with a spoon; he then sprinkled pounded loaf-sugar over it, and grated nutmeg upon it, and devoured the mass with a prodigious relish. He was standing one day in the middle of the room, basin in hand, feeding himself voraciously, gorging himself with pap. 'Why, Bysshe,' I said, 'you lap it up as greedily as the Valkyriæ in Scandinavian story lap up the blood of the slain!' 'Aye!' he shouted out with grim delight; I lap up the blood of the slain!' The idea captivated him; he was continually repeating the words; and he often took panada, I suspect, merely to indulge this wild fancy, and say, 'I am going to lap up the blood of the slain! to sup up the gore of murdered kings!'"

The story might, no doubt, be told of almost any one; yet the fascination of this not very striking joke for Shelley's mind is partly explained by the character of much of his poetry, which not unfrequently and purposely dips into curdling subjects, simply for the sake of the chill to the blood, the vibration to the nerves. When he said to Nature in 'Alastor,'

> "I have made my bed
> In charnels and on coffins, where black death
> Keeps records of the trophies won from thee,"

he probably scarcely exaggerated the reality. At least,

one of his letters to Mr. Hogg begins with an excuse for a bad handwriting on the ground of cold, because "I have been pacing a churchyard all night." And there is not one of his longer poems in which he does not alternate the breathless upward flight of his own skylark with occasional plunges into a weird world of morbid horrors. He has described to us, in his hymn to Intellectual Beauty, how intimately connected in his mind was the first thrill of his adoration for the universal Beauty with these moods of startled and fascinated dread :—

"While yet a boy, I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed :
I was not heard, I saw them not ;
When musing deeply on the lot
Of life at that sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of buds and blossoming,
Sudden thy shadow fell on me ;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!

I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine ; have I not kept the vow?
With beating heart and streaming eyes even now
I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
Each from his voiceless grave : they have, in visioned bowers
Of studious zeal or love's delight,
Outwatched with me the envious night :
They know that never joy illumed my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou would'st free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou, O awful LOVELINESS,
Would'st give whate'er these words cannot express."

"Awful Loveliness" Shelley calls this object of his adoration; and there is, I suppose, no doubt that he ascribed significance to the term, but certainly not the significance which most men assign to it; he did not mean to refer to that bending of the humiliated spirit before a free Power from whom it craves much, from whom it can compel nothing, that expresses to most of us the essence of "awe." The loveliness which he called "awful" was one which he hoped to uncover and take by storm, the awe only whetting the force of his desire;—not a generous power, but a half-veiled source of anticipated rapture. Profound awelessness, indeed, characterises all Shelley's poetry, both on subjects of human and divine mystery. No doubt the habit of tearing the veil rudely from all subjects over which the reverence of nature or custom had cast them was peculiar to the revolutionary era in which Shelley was born, and it cannot have been counteracted by either the companion of his youth or the companion of his maturity. His college friend and biographer, Mr. Hogg, seems, by his own account, to have acted the part of a very conceited Mephistopheles to Shelley's 'Faust,' mocking his enthusiasm and encouraging all his wildest irreverence. Such an influence as is shown by the following story cannot but have tended to render Shelley even less inclined to bow before the object of others' worship than he was by nature:—

"Shelley took me one Sunday to dine with his father, by invitation, at Miller's hotel, over Westminster Bridge. We breakfasted early, and sallied forth, taking as usual a long walk. He told me

that his father would behave strangely, and that I must be prepared for him; and he described his ordinary behaviour on such occasions. I thought the portrait was exaggerated, and I told him so; but he assured me that it was not.

Shelley had generally one volume at least in his pocket whenever he went out to walk. He produced a little book, and read various passages from it aloud. It was an unfavourable and unfair criticism on the Old Testament—some work of Voltaire's, if I mistake not, which he had lately picked up on a stall. He found it amusing, and read many pages aloud to me, laughing heartily at the excessive and extravagant ridicule of the Jewish nation, their theocracy, laws, and peculiar usages.

We arrived at the appointed hour of five at the hotel, but dinner had been postponed until six. Mr. Graham, whom I had seen before, was there. Mr. Timothy Shelley received me kindly; but he presently began to talk in an odd unconnected manner; scolding, crying, swearing, and then weeping again; no doubt he went on strangely. 'What do you think of my father?' Shelley whispered to me.

I had my head filled with the book which I had heard read aloud all the morning, and I whispered, in answer, 'Oh, he is not your father. It is the God of the Jews; the Jehovah you have been reading about!' Shelley was sitting at the moment, as he often used to sit, quite on the edge of his chair. Not only did he laugh aloud, with a wild demoniacal burst of laughter, but he slipped from his seat and fell on his back at full length on the floor.

'What is the matter, Bysshe? Are you ill? Are you dead? Are you mad? Why do you laugh?'"

It was not likely that a man who was thus early helped to throw away in one cast the reverence of nature for an earthly and a heavenly father, could have ever permitted the mere shrinking of instinct to deter him from entering in imagination into the arcana of any subject where the stream of desire led him; and the only wonder is that in later life he should, in comparison at least with

Byron, have shown a spirit of lofty reverence and self-restraint.

Shelley's awelessness of nature—"curiosity," as Hazlitt calls it—is only the result of the limitless longing with which he seeks to tear the veil from almost any secret, human or divine; and yet not in the spirit of a thirst for new *truth*, so much as a thirst for a new effervescence between knowledge and feeling. This characteristic in Shelley is an exceedingly different thing from that species of scoffing wit in which Byron attained such preeminence, and which consists in dashing cold water, as it were, in the face of a mysterious or sacred Power, without ever caring to penetrate the secret of the mystery. Shelley's intellect was far subtler than Byron's, and betrayed no fascination for mere acts of intellectual impertinence. Byron was a grown-up schoolboy, with a keen pleasure in playing practical jokes on solemn Powers in which he half believed. Shelley crept up to them with an irresistible longing to peep under the veil, and feel a new thrill vibrate through his own nature. Still, as I said, his temptation was not to scoffing, but to a morbid subtlety of imagination on unhealthy subjects; and the irreverence cherished in the external relations of life by the unhappy peculiarities of a coarse and obstinate father, and the petty sarcastic egotism of his most intimate friend, cannot but have had an influence in dissolving the spell of that inward awe which arrests the curious imagination on the verge of subjects which it is not good for it to touch.

And, quite apart from the influences of his early culture, I must admit that Shelley's mind resembled that of the Greeks in not being clothed with that instinctive "mutual awe" which Plato makes, in his Protagoras, the natural protection of all human society. There is a mental characteristic, setting a bound to what we may call spiritual *familiarities*, which the Jews, the Romans, and the English have in common, and in which Greeks and Frenchmen always seem to be comparatively deficient, which Voltaire and Rousseau had almost eradicated from the minds of their pupils, which is not very easy to define, but which we all recognise as existing at once both in the spirit of worship, and in the repelling shame which acts like a molecular force to limit the mutual approaches of human beings, and to guard the precincts of certain subjects from the invasion even of imagination, —to which we give this name of awe. It is flagrantly violated in the anecdote we have quoted from Mr. Hogg. It is best illustrated perhaps by the spirit which breathes in the old Hebrew tradition of Jacob's dream, or that vision of Moses which taught him to "put off the shoes from his feet." When Jacob rises from the sleep in which he had seen the ladder connecting earth and heaven, he says, "How dreadful is this place! Behold the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not. This is no other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven." Here is the spirit of awe, — which sees a shadow of mystery cast from above even on the colour of a dream. It is a spirit which may pass into slavish superstition,

but which still gives us the true attitude both for worship, and for appreciating best the depths of human character. The opposite to it is the spirit which is attracted by the very presence of a veil to pierce it, by a shadow of power to brave it, by a secret recoil of nature to overcome it, by an indefinable reserve to defy it. Shelley seems to have been a shy man ; but, like many shy men, he seems almost to have revelled in breaking, in imagination, through all the boundary-walls of nature, and following the wave of desire into the penetralia of life, both human and divine. "Superstition" was his one great foe. "Thou taintest all thou look'st upon," he said, and forthwith strove to banish the attitude of reverence from his spirit in dealing with religious subjects. This was his usual style :—

> "Grey Power was seated
> Safely on her ancestral throne ;
> And Faith, the Python undefeated,
> Even to its blood-stained step dragged on
> Her foul and wounded train, and men
> Were trampled on and deceived again."

And so on *ad nauscam.* The same spirit of almost morbid fascination for anything positively *nefas*, penetrated into the human subjects treated by his imagination. In his delineations of love, he is always urging on passion to the impossible leap over the boundaries of personality itself :—

> "The fountains of our deepest life shall be
> Confused in passion's golden purity,"

he sings ; and he can scarcely bear to admit any vestige

of personal distinction at all,—beating as it were almost frantically at the barrier between mind and mind :—

> "We shall become the same, we shall be one
> Spirit within two frames : oh, wherefore two ?
> One passion in twin hearts which grows and grew,
> Till, like two meteors of expanding flame,
> Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
> Touch, mingle, are transfigured ; ever still
> Burning, yet ever inconsumable :
> In one another's substance finding food,
> Like flames too pure and light and unimbued,
> To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
> Which point to Heaven and cannot pass away ;
> One hope within two wills, one will beneath
> Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
> One Heaven, one Hell, one Immortality,
> And one annihilation."

I do not quote this as an instance of the violation of natural reserves, of which I think Shelley is often guilty, but to show the force of the impulse which led his imagination to violate such reserves, when once he had ceased to respect them. That eager mind rushing breathlessly along the track of imaginative desire, would have needed much to convince it that any precincts were inviolable.

Thus far it would seem that Shelley's genius was almost the opposite of mystical,—that instead of halting on the edge of the spiritual world, and bending before its mighty mysteries, he dissipates,—to his own satisfaction at least,—a host of illusions, by pursuing with frantic eagerness one or two hasty trains of ardent personal impression, which he does not hesitate to spur into

a region of thought far beyond their legitimate bounds. This is the spirit of an enthusiast, no doubt, but certainly not of a mystic. When he told Mr. Hogg that there could be "no entire regeneration of mankind till laughter was put down," he spoke in the spirit not of the mystical, but of the most explicit enthusiasm,—of a man who had what seemed to him the most definite notions, and did not love to hear their foundation shaken by irony. And Shelley's mysticism does certainly arise much more from a refusal to recognise some very large regions of life and nature,—from the exceedingly limited sphere of his wonderful imagination, and the complete *abandon* with which he trusts its guidance in the reconstruction of the spiritual universe, than from any conscious recognition of a great world of unexplored mystery. This a little examination will, I think, suffice to prove. Shelley never shows his full power in dealing separately with either intellectual or moral or physical beauty. His appropriate sphere was what I may call swift sensibility, the intersecting line between the sensuous and the intellectual or moral. Mere sensation is too literal for him, mere feeling too blind and dumb, mere thought too cold; but in the line where sensation and feeling are just passing into thought, where the stream of desire receives a new poignancy from the chill current of subtle discrimination with which his mind penetrated it, his great power lay. Nothing can illustrate it better than an exquisitely beautiful poem which Mr. Garnett first gave to the world:—

"She left me at the silent time
When the moon had ceased to climb
The azure path of Heaven's steep,
And, like an albatross asleep,
Balanced on her wings of light,
Hovered in the purple night,
Ere she sought her ocean nest
In the chambers of the West.
She left me, and I stayed alone,
Thinking over every tone
Which, though now silent to the ear,
The enchanted heart could hear,
Like notes which die when born, but still
Haunt the echoes of the hill;
And feeling ever—O too much!
The soft vibration of her touch,
As if her gentle hand, even now,
Lightly trembled on my brow;
And thus, although she absent were,
Memory gave me all of her
That even Fancy dares to claim.
Her presence had made weak and tame
All passions, and I lived alone
In the time which is our own;
The past and future were forgot,
As they had been, and would be not.
But soon, the guardian angel gone,
The dæmon reassumed his throne
In my faint heart. I dared not speak
My thoughts; but thus disturbed and weak,
I sat and watched the vessels glide
Over the ocean bright and wide,
Like spirit-winged chariots sent
O'er some serenest element,
For ministrations strange and far;
As if to some Elysian star
Sailed for drink to medicine
Such sweet and bitter pain as mine.

And the wind that winged their flight
From the land came fresh and light,
And the scent of sleeping flowers,
And the coolness of the hours
Of dew, and sweet warmth left by day,
Was scattered over the twinkling bay.
And the fisher, with his lamp,
And spear, about the low rocks' damp
Crept, and struck the fish which came
To worship the delusive flame.
Too happy they, whose pleasure sought
Extinguishes all sense and thought
Of the regret that pleasure leaves,
Destroying life alone, not peace!"

But this is more tranquil than is usual with Shelley in poems of equal beauty. The feeling of want which sighs through it is less bitter, the effervescence between the sense of beauty and the longing for it is less vivid; there is more of still reflectiveness, of patient thought, than is quite characteristic of him. Generally, in the more perfect minor poems, you almost see the angel troubling the water,—the very thrill of intellectualised impulse,—the fixed air of thought bubbling up through the intermittent springs of hot desire. Mr. Trelawny has given us a very graphic account of this:—

"The day I found Shelley in the pine-forest, he was writing verses on a guitar. I picked up a fragment, but could only make out the first two lines:

'Ariel, to Miranda take
This slave of music.'

It was a frightful scrawl; words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers, and all run together in most 'admired disorder;' it might have been taken for a sketch of

a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks; such a dashed-off daub as self-conceited artists mistake for a manifestation of genius. On my observing this to him, he answered, 'When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning, when cooled down, out of the rude sketch, as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing.'"

This gives one key to Shelley's mysticism. Shelley's mind was heated through at a much lower comparative temperature, if I may be allowed the expression, than almost any other English poet's. I would not say, as Mr. Emerson has said of some minor poet, that the susceptibility of his imagination illustrated the proverb, "little pot soon hot;" for Shelley stands in the very front rank of English poets. But still there was something of tenuity in the essence of his genius, which is clearly connected with this liability to rapid excitation. I would rather say, that his genius resembles the water taken to a mountain-top, and which, under that attenuated atmospheric pressure, boils with far less heat —or at all events what *seems* to general observers far less heat—than other men's. Under the influence of a sentiment which would at most warm the surface of other poets' minds into a genial glow, Shelley's bubbles up from its very depths, in a sort of pale passion, and seethes with imprisoned thought. This alone produces a mystifying effect on ordinary minds. To feel that Shelley breathes an exceedingly rarefied atmosphere of abstract sentiment, and yet see this rarefied air intoxicating his imagination into the bounding pulse of a most

ardent passion, is like hearing a flow of hot thought from the lips of a spectre, or seeing the bloodless ichor coursing furiously through its veins. There is something necessarily mystifying in this. The sentiment is half abstract; the ardour is almost unparalleled even in the most eager pursuits of human passion; and the crowd of impressions and images which rush in so thickly, merely to amplify an apparently thin, if not unreal, sentiment, is perfectly dizzying to any reader at the first onset.

If we examine wherein consists the abstract and ideal air which colours Shelley's most ardent poetic passion, we shall find it partly due to the ideal susceptibilities of his mind, but in some measure also to the habit he had of writing down trains of secondary feeling, of which the living explanation was contained in his own memory, and nowhere else. 'Epipsychidion,' for instance, to ordinary readers the most mystical of all his poems, was probably to him one of the most simply expressive; but then it paints the impressions made upon him by persons and events entirely beneath the horizon of the poem. The practical centre or focus of his meaning lies concealed in his own heart, while all that he pictures for us is the secondary effect exerted upon himself, without the causes which produced it. We are in the position of the prisoners in Plato's myth, who see the flickering shadows on the wall of the cave, but never the real objects which cast those shadows. In the poem I have mentioned, 'Epipsychidion,' Shelley intends to describe apparently the three abstract types of feminine influence

of which he had the most vivid experience; but he can scarcely be said to give us even so much as their *shadows* on his imagination: rather he gives us three distinct aromas; and yet notwithstanding this, the fire with which the verse seems almost to pant, is more ardent than in most poems of direct passion. Here is the first feminine influence he is subjected to, the deleterious enchantress:—

> "One whose voice was venomed melody
> Sate by a well, under blue nightshade bowers;
> The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers;
> Her touch was as electric poison; flame
> Out of her looks into my vitals came;
> And from her living cheeks and bosom flew
> A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew
> Into the core of my green heart, and lay
> Upon its leaves; until, as hair grown grey
> O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime
> With ruins of unseasonable time."

It would be impossible to describe the poisonous subtlety of beautiful falsehood with more intensity; this enchantress diffuses an atmosphere of killing excitement, which enters and blights at every pore. But still the poet fails to make the reader understand the intensity of his horror, because he does not present even a phantom to the mind, does not give even a glimpse of the cause, —only of the effect. One can scarcely imagine here that the glow of the poet's own feeling is purely ideal in origin; at all events, it may relate to some painful personal experience. Yet it has all the mystical effect of a phantom passion, the object of it, if not purely ideal,

being beyond our view. And the same is quite as true of the other personifications in this remarkable poem.

But assuredly no such clue of personal experience runs through some of the most passionate of Shelley's poems. 'Alastor,' for instance, embodies a purely ideal passion, and yet one so ardent, that it draws the hero, who is an imaginative copy of Shelley, across the Balkan, over the steppes of Southern Russia, into a little leaky boat on the Black Sea, where, using his cloak for a sail, he drives for two days, with his hair very naturally turning grey all the time; and having sailed up one of the rivers that flow down from the Caucasus, he dies in a spot of apparently impossible geography, his whole career being a wild pursuit of a vision presented to him in a dream, the fascination of which dwindles into a pair of visionary eyes:—

> "When his regard
> Was raised by intense pensiveness, two eyes,
> Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought,
> And seemed, with their serene and azure smiles,
> To beckon him."

No theory of the eyes can dispel the apparent incommensurability between the cause and the effect. Had Lord Jeffrey reviewed the poem, he would assuredly have passed a very short and rude judgment on the eyes, and perhaps on the poet too. And yet this is certainly one of Shelley's most characteristic and most beautiful poems. It is a ghostly kind of passion that is described, but the ghostly passion throbs as high as ever did that of man.

The truth seems to be, that Shelley's mind was powerfully excited neither by the proper spiritual nor by the proper physical world, neither by the supernatural nor by the natural, but by an ideal zone peculiar to himself, where the uninteresting part, as he thought it, of reality was purged away, and the solemn shadow of unseen power was not yet reached. His imagination does not seem to have been strong enough to weld together the invisible and visible, the spiritual causes and the earthly phenomena, into a single imaginative whole. "Lift not the painted veil," he said, "which those who live call life," even "though unreal shapes be pictured there." He had tried to lift it, and it only made him lose his hold of life, without gaining any hold of unseen realities. And this just suggests the true sphere of his genius. He recoiled from the world of living reality; he had not penetrated to the world of unseen might; his imagination remained suspended between the two, wielding a wonderful power over ideal essences, but neither giving them a strong hold on life nor reaching their root in eternity. His intellect, subtle as it was, had no muscular comprehensiveness in it; if I may use a somewhat pedantic expression, it had no integrating power. It was swift, and infinite in fertility; but the only string by which he ever bound his thoughts firmly together was continuity of desire. There was but the faintest measure of binding strength in his thought, the faintest possible will in it. Hence he had no enjoyment at all in reality as such. There never was a poet who had less sympathy with the

pre-Raphaelite school of art. Poets and artists, theologians and thinkers and politicians, who hunger after reality, hold, we suppose, that the actual combination of qualities and substances and personal influences, as God has made them, contains something much better worth knowing and imagining accurately, than any recast they could effect of their own. They believe in the infinite significance of actual ties. And those who feel this, as modern society does usually feel it, must cherish a certain spirit of faithful tenacity at the bottom of their minds, a respect for the mere fact of existence, a wish to see good reason before they separate things joined together by nature, and perhaps, they will think, by divine law; a disposition to cling to the details of experience, as having at least a presumptive sacredness; nay, even a higher love for such beauty as is presented to them in the real universe, than for any which is got by the dissolving and recomposing power of their own eclectic idealism.

Shelley shows no trace of this feeling. He is idealist to the heart's core. The root of much of the sort of feeling I have described, is fidelity of temperament, and Shelley had but very little of this; he did not instinctively cling to things or persons as he had seen and known them, simply because he had so seen and known them. Again, a good deal more of the same feeling is due to a spiritual preference for that beauty and goodness which has penetrated and conquered a resisting force, as compared with the natural beauty of simple trans-

parency, which has exerted no such moulding power. Shelley had no such preference. He shrank from the resisting force as intrinsically ugly, *because* it resisted the magic of beauty; and his only idea was to refine away the coarse material of earth until the magic remained pure and undiluted. His adoration is all for the ease and richness and warmth of overflowing, passionate, lavish beauty. Asia, in his 'Prometheus Unbound,' is his true goddess, and he paints her thus:—

"Life of Life! thy lips enkindle
With their love the breath between them;
And thy smiles before they dwindle
Make the cold air fire; then screen them
In those looks, where whoso gazes
Faints, entangled in their mazes.

Child of Light! thy lips are burning
Through the vest which seems to hide them,
As the radiant lines of morning
Through the clouds ere they divide them;
And this atmosphere divinest
Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.

Fair are others; none beholds thee,
But thy voice sounds low and tender,
Like the fairest, for it folds thee
From the sight, that liquid splendour;
And all feel, yet see thee never,
As I feel now, lost for ever!

Lamp of earth! where'er thou movest,
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
And the souls of whom thou lovest
Walk upon the winds with lightness,
Till they fail as I am failing,
Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing."

Nothing could express better the ideal of melting beauty; the beauty which, like a rich odour, makes us "faint," according to Shelley's own favourite expression.

Further again, as I have already said, Shelley's intellect and imagination were not of a sort to master a complex whole. There was no *grip* in them. Infinitely subtle they were; and if they had had more volition, they might perhaps have been less subtle; but of volition they were almost destitute. His imagination was of one dimension only,—a point of moving fire generating myriads of beautiful shapes, but never illuminating any thing beyond the single series of connected positions which the spark traversed between the moment of kindling and the moment of extinction. Hence the far greater perfection of his shorter lyrics; and the superiority of the 'Cenci,' which is constituted by one single thrill of preternatural horror, to any other of his longer poems. He never holds up either a subject or a character steadily before his mind to examine it in all its parts; even the 'Cenci' is a passion, not a drama,—the silver gleam of a winter torrent down a terrific precipice, leaving a shudder behind, and no more.

Thus Shelley's intellectual, moral, and emotional nature alike made him a pure idealist. There was no moulding, no subduing, no conquering element in the Beauty he worshipped. It conquered by passive fascination alone, not by any inherent dominating force. There was no inherent strength in his conception of beauty. He *ab-*

stracted it from the world, instead of impressing or imposing it on it. His intellect had no grappling-irons wherewith to cling to the existing order of things till he had exhausted its possibilities; his conscience showed the finest feminine qualities, and even faithfulness in the sense of mere endurance, but recoiled abruptly from all aggressive exploits against the coarse jumbled evils of the world; his affections were not dumb conservative things, which fastened on the forms consecrated by time and usage, but swift gleams of chameleon-like rapture. His creed on this head he has versified for us, though he was perhaps higher than his creed. The passage throws a considerable light on his whole cast of intellect:—

"I never was attached to that great sect
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion; though it is the code
Of modern morals, and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread
Who travel to their home among the dead
By the broad highway of the world, and so
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
The dreariest and the longest journey go.
True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away;
Love is like understanding, that grows bright
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
Imagination! which from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human fantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sunlike arrow
Of its reveberated lightning. Narrow

> The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
> The life that wears, the spirit that creates
> One object and one form, and builds thereby
> A sepulchre for its eternity."

This is the natural creed of an inconstant imagination.

Rapid change, strung together only by the continuity of a flash of feeling, being thus the law of Shelley's imagination, all his longer poems, except the 'Cenci,' are very defective in unity. Even 'Adonais' is only a shimmer of beautiful regret, full of arbitrary though harmonious and delicate fancies; and the 'Witch of Atlas' gauges for us the spontaneous tendencies of Shelley's volatile and inconstant imagination when it happened to be entirely free from the spell of any strong desire, and shows us how loose was the texture of his genius when not dominated by such feelings. No other poet could make us take the slightest interest in the subject. The witch is the impersonation of Shelley's own fancy-free imagination, and is said to be the spirit of love, but exhibits it only in the shape of that pale gentleness of disposition which Shelley so often confounded with love. She, like the poet himself, has storehouses of all essences of beauty, "sounds of air," "folded in cells of crystal silence:"—

> "Such as we hear in youth, and think the feeling
> Will never die; yet, ere we are aware,
> The feeling and the sound are fled and gone,
> And the regret they leave remains alone."

And then, too, she has essences of dreams, "swift, sweet, and quaint," each "in his thin sheath like a chrysalis;"

and "odours in a kind of aviary" which are commissioned to stir sweet thoughts or sad in destined minds; and even "liquors clear and sweet,"—a sort of essence of healing influences, the agreeable quintessence of a celestial apothecary's shop, without any of the unpleasant terrestial alloys,—in fact, all the beauties which Shelley had distilled in thought out of this miscellaneous world; —and wonderful atoms of detailed beauty they are, most exquisitely combining thoughts with perceptions, but wanting as a whole just in the very thing in which Shelley's imagination was wanting,—connecting purpose or subduing comprehensiveness. The Witch does not sleep at night, but lies in trance, "with open eyes, closed feet, and folded palm," in the fountain, watching the constellations reel and dance over her; or, in winter, in a well of crimson fire, watching the flakes of snow melt as they touch it. She moulds a sexless companion out of snow and fire "tempered by love," and with it voyages about, "circling the image of a shooting star," and otherwise investigating all the subtle dreams of Shelley's fancy. But her most characteristic occupation is the one Shelley assigns her in human affairs: here she would defeat all the crooked purposes of priests and hypocrites, but without changing the heart of deceit; she would gratify lovers' passions, and save them from the results; in short, she would remove all the natural obstructions to the sweeter desires of human life, defeat the unnatural vices, and smooth the way to a placid adjustment of wants and pleasures. This is an exact reflection of the spon-

taneous reverie of Shelley's imagination when not illuminated by some glowing flash of feeling. It busied itself with fusing together mental and sensuous impressions into symbols of rare beauty; in shaking them up in the kaleidoscope of his delicate fancy; or in using them more thoughtfully to construct a world from which all wrong and violence should be eliminated;—a thin world of distilled loveliness and spontaneous instinct, but containing nothing that could be called the strength of divine love,—a world in which evil should be foiled or evaporated rather than conquered.

This interlunar sphere, in which Shelley places the activity of his Witch of Atlas, is the region with which his own imagination was most familiar,—the sphere of ideal beauty lying midway between Divine Power and human life. His mysticism arises quite as much from his refusal to acknowledge the world beyond, as from his reluctance to meddle with the coarse details on this side of his chosen sphere. His Witch of Atlas puts forth nothing which can be called constraining power at all,—she only removes friction; and it was a characteristic of Shelley's mind that he could scarcely conceive either Power or Government, properly so called, except as pure evil and tyranny. This alone gives much of the apparent mysticism both to his political and his religious poems. It is obvious, I suppose, that politics involve a faith in government, religion a faith in the divine *Will*. Shelley had no such faith. He believed rather in the abolition of government than in government; in the divinity of

love perhaps, but love of the thinnest naturalistic type, certainly not in the love of infinite *power*. Hence there are no poems that seem more hazy to our own age than his political and religious dreams. In both he is striving to delineate something to which beneficent power is essential, and he does it by an elision of the very idea. He paints a mere shadow of Influence, a white symbol of Acquiescence, thinner and less real than the Witch of Atlas herself, and puts the reins of this headstrong universe into its hands. In his political poems, indeed, Shelley scarcely takes the trouble to sketch even a shadow of government, while he carefully erases all the distinctive features which give force and reality to the meaning of the word :—

> "The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains,
> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself, just, gentle, wise."

All that is wanted to his imagination is the rejection of the tyrannical yoke, not the imposition of a just one. Man would be greater if "sceptreless, free, equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless," than under the laws which are the growth of history, and which recognise the actual distinctions between nation and nation. From the sceptre on the one hand, from the vulgar details of national prejudice and peculiarities on the other, his ideal mind alike recoiled. When Shelley was writing his poem of 'Hellas,' Trelawny insisted on taking him

to see actual Greeks on board the ships at Leghorn, that he might better know what he was writing of. They found the Greek crews "squatting about the decks in small knots, shrieking, gesticulating, smoking, eating, and gambling, like savages." "'Does this realise your idea of Hellenism, Shelley?' I said. 'No; but it does of Hell,' he replied." The skipper was opposed to the Greek revolution because it "interrupted trade." "Come away," said Shelley; "there is not a drop of the old Hellenic blood here. These are not the men to rekindle the ancient Greek fire; their souls are extinguished by traffic and superstition. Come away; I had rather not have any more of my hopes and illusions mocked by sad realities." This is a striking picture of the recoil of Shelley's mind from the actual men concerning whose political state he dreamed and poetised.

And of course he neglected to notice not only the vices and faults which render some government necessary by way of remedy, but also many virtues and capacities for life in common, which render all such government valuable as a concentration of the energies of a united race. *Abstract* man might live perhaps "sceptreless, tribeless, and nationless;" but with the actual qualities shared by the tribe and the nation the value of the sceptre begins. One can easily understand, therefore, the feeling which Shelley is said to have expressed to Mr. Hogg: "With how unconquerable an aversion do I shrink from political articles in newspapers and reviews! I have heard people talk politics by the hour,

and how I hated it and them! I went with my father several times to the House of Commons, and what creatures did I see there! what faces! what an expression of countenance! what wretched beings!" Here he raised his voice to a painful pitch with fervid dislike. "Good God! what men did we meet about the House, in the lobbies and passages; and my father was so civil to all of them—to animals that I regarded with unmitigated disgust!" Of course he did: here he found the stringy fibre of real politics,—power in its coarse form, wielding vulgar motives and machinery—the *gristle* of government. Shelley had no belief in such government. He wanted to see man "tribeless and nationless," following gentle instincts without any friction or any yoke.

But if Shelley's political view of men is confusing, because it ignores the governing power and the need of government in man, his religious view of the world is still more so, from a corresponding *hiatus* in his spiritual creed. It is curious that both in politics and in religion he has a tendency to give us feminine softness as the sovereign power, where he will allow us any. In the 'Revolt of Islam,' Laone, if any one, fills the vacuum left by the throne,—certainly Laone more than Laon, who is himself feminine enough. In the 'Prometheus Unbound,' while Prometheus brings about the catastrophe by patient endurance, Asia, as I have said, is the only positive representation of the "ruling" spirit of love; and Asia is a rich overpowering perfume rather than a power. Demogorgon, the genius of Eternity,

who, in appearance at least, dethrones the tyrant Jupiter when the fated hour comes, is a form of Zero. He sits waiting for his task in the gloom, and never appears to do anything again after it is performed. The whole catastrophe is significantly enough brought about by passive virtues; and Demogorgon is therefore fitly enough the pure Nothing, the "reine Nichts," or at best, let us say, Kant's pure idea of *à priori* Time seated in *à priori* Space, who overthrows the tyrant at last simply because the tyrant's day is done. 'Panthea' describes him thus, and he is even more negative than he is described to be :—

> "I see a mighty Darkness
> Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
> Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,
> Ungazed upon and shapeless ; neither limb,
> Nor form, nor outline ; yet we feel it is
> A living Spirit."

The reader does *not* feel it at all, and certainly Shelley as a poet did not feel it,—nothing can be more imbecile than Demogorgon's function in the poem. Prometheus represents only created beings; and his virtues are summed up in lines which tell how anxiously Shelley wished to inculcate that the highest virtues of the creature are purely passive :—

> "To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite,
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night,
> To defy power which seems omnipotent,
> To love and bear, to hope till Hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates ;
> Neither to change, nor flatter, nor repent,—

> This, like, thy glory, Titan, is to be
> Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free;
> This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory."

In this fine poem Shelley in reality puts no personal Power over Jupiter. Tyranny he represents as personal will; but the power that dethrones tyranny is a breath, a shadow, nothing. In short, Will falls from the throne of the Universe by its own weight, and there is nothing to take its place. To Shelley all will is obstructive; the only being he can really worship is the rich radiant spirit of feminine loveliness, through whom alone even Prometheus can find his rest; and even for her he feels not worship, but "the desire of the moth for the star."

The characteristics, then, of Shelley's poetical mysticism seem to me to be the spirit of unsatisfied desire which kindles it, the intellectualised character of that desire, impregnated as it is everywhere with the fixed air of subtle thought, and yet never dominated or controlled by that thought,—a consequent awelessness of instinct, which rushes on its way with a craving whetted by the desultory stirrings of a hungry intellect into the curiosity of passion,—an eclectic idealism, which recoils from everything unattractive,—a love of beauty, which excludes the attribute of strength, and includes only passive virtues,—all culminating in the substitution of either Time or Zero in the place of the power of God. I do not think that Shelley's genius, trained as it was, could have taken any other path of development. He received in his earliest days

the severest shock of repulsion from the world as it was. His whole genius led him to the elaboration of ideal beauties. There was something of his own "Sensitive Plant" in his mind, which made him start away from repulsive qualities, and rendered him incapable of reconciling contradictions, or holding together with a strong hand the various elements of a complex problem. Into one side of human perfection he had a far higher insight than most men of his day,—the passive nobility of beautiful instinct and endurance. But the very idealising tendency which repelled him from human politics repelled him also from all human creeds, and the very first objection he took to them was to their demand of deference for a spiritual King. From all arbitrary authority he recoiled, and never apparently conceived the reality of *authority* properly so called, not arbitrary. Hence, to save his faith in human nature, he was almost compelled to seat a shadow on the throne of the Universe. The only marvel is, that his imagination still kept a throne of the Universe at all, even for a shadow. His ideal world was one "where music and moonlight and feeling are one," and in such a world apparently no throne or sceptre would be needed. The result of his idealism, as of all such idealism, was, that he nowhere found any true rest for his spirit, since he never came upon any free and immutable will on which to lean. The sense of weakness, of a longing to lean somewhere, without recognising any strength on which to lean, runs through his whole poems:—

> "Yet now despair itself is mild
> Even as the winds and waters are;
> I could lie down like a tired child,
> And weep away the life of care
> Which I have borne, and yet must bear,"

is a burden that reappears habitually in his poetry. There is but one passage in all Shelley's exquisite poetry which rises into pure sublimity,—because power is of the essence of sublimity, and Shelley had no true sense of power. But one does, and that is, characteristically enough, the passage in which he puts into Beatrice Cenci's heart the sudden doubt lest the spiritual world be without God after all:—

> "Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be
> No God, no Heaven, no Earth, in the void world,—
> The wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!"

A sublimer line was scarcely ever written. It casts just a gleam on the infinite horror of an empty eternity, and then drops the veil again, leaving the infinitude of weakness and emptiness intensified into a sublimity. Yet here is the true root of Shelley's restlessness—the suspicion that when desire fails, the object of the heart's desire may fail with it,—that "the One" who "remains" is a thinner, fainter, less living thing than the "many" which "change and pass,"—that there is nothing substantial at the heart of the universe,—no Will behind the fleeting beauty, no strength of self-sacrifice behind the melting love. Shelley was no Atheist. His Pantheism was sincere, and at times no doubt a kind of faith to him; but belief in a universal essence gave no solidity

to the order of the world, no firm law to the flux and reflux of human desire, had no power to say, "Be still, and know that I am God." Behind this "form and flush of the universal beauty" there always lay a dreadful phantom of possible emptiness. He felt of Pantheistic hopes as he felt of the pictured falsehoods on the surface of the individual mind, that they might be all illusory scenic effects. "Lift not the painted veil which those who live call life." What if we were to find even behind the fresco of universal loveliness nothing but a "wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world"?

IV.

MR. BROWNING.[1]

MR. BROWNING, though commanding a wider intellectual sweep of view than almost any artist of our day, is hardly as yet a poet of European, even if of national celebrity, but rather the favourite of an intellectual sect; and this, not from any sectarian tendency in his poetry,—nothing could be more catholic,—but from the almost complete absence of that atmosphere of fascination about his *verse*, that melody of mind and speech, which is the main attraction of poetry to ordinary men, and but for which, mere imaginative power, however great, would scarcely arrest their attention at all. Coleridge once defined poetry—very badly I conceive—as "that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object

[1] 'The Poetical Works of Robert Browning.' 3 vols. Third edition. Chapman and Hall.
'The Ring and the Book.' 4 vols. Smith and Elder, 1869.

pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having *this* object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole* as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*." Now Coleridge certainly did not *intend* to exclude Mr. Browning's works by anticipation from all claim to the title of poems; if he had lived to read Mr. Browning, Coleridge's profound, rich, and catholic imagination would scarcely have failed to appreciate fully the power and insight of the younger poet; but no definition of a poem could have been contrived more ingeniously calculated to exclude Mr. Browning's works from that class of composition. Most of Mr. Browning's poems might be described precisely "as proposing for their *immediate* object truth, not pleasure, and as aiming at such a satisfaction from the whole as is by no means compatible with any very distinct gratification from each component part." In other words, Mr. Browning's poems, though, when clearly apprehended, they seldom fail to give that higher kind of imaginative satisfaction which is one of the most enviable intellectual states,—give a very moderate amount of immediate sensitive pleasure. There is little of the thrill through the brain, of the vibrating melodious sweetness, of thet iranquillising harmony, of the atmosphere of loveliness, which one usually associates with the highest powers of poetical expression. And then, as to the relation of the whole to the part, which is Coleridge's second test of a poem, Mr. Browning's poems are not so organised that the parts have any

high gratification for you, till you catch a view of his whole.

Coleridge says, that "the reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the solution, but by the pleasurable activity of the mind, excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power, or like the path of sound through the air, at every step he (the poet) pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward." Nothing could be farther from describing the movement of Mr. Browning's poems. Instead of fascinating you with his harmony of movement, and gradually insinuating the drift and spirit of the poem into your imagination, Mr. Browning rushes upon you with a sort of intellectual *douche*, half stuns you with the abruptness of the shock, repeats the application in a multitude of swift various jets from unexpected points of the compass, and leaves you at last giddy and wondering where you are, but with a vague sense that, were you but properly prepared beforehand, you would discern a real unity and power in this intellectual water-spout, though its first descent only drenched and bewildered your imagination. Take the following short poem for example, one of really marvellous force, indeed of true genius, but which I purposely decline to present with any further introduction than Mr. Browning has himself accorded; in order to illustrate this characteristic

of his, that the whole must be fairly grasped before any of the "component parts" are intelligible,—the component parts, indeed, being little more than diminutive wholes, too diminutive in scale to be clearly legible until you have seen the whole, whence you go back to the component parts again with a key to their meaning that at last gradually deciphers them :—

SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER.

"Gr-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flower-pots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you!
What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming?
Oh, that rose has prior claims—
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
Hell dry you up with its flames!

At the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
What's the Latin name for 'parsley'?
What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
Laid with care on our own shelf!
With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
And a goblet for ourself.
Rinsed like something sacrificial
Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps—
Marked with L. for our initial!
(He-he! There his lily snaps!)

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
Squats outside the Convent bank,
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
Steeping tresses in the tank,

Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
  Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
  (That is, if he'd let it show!)

When he finishes refection,
  Knife and fork he never lays
Cross-wise, to my recollection,
  As do I, in Jesu's praise.
I, the Trinity illustrate,
  Drinking watered orange-pulp—
In three sips the Arian frustrate;
  While he drains his at one gulp!

Oh, those melons! If he's able
  We're to have a feast so nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
  All of us get each a slice.
How go on your flowers? None double;
  Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange!—And I, too, at such trouble,
  Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

There's a great text in Galatians,
  Once you trip on it entails
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
  One sure, if another fails:
If I trip him just a-dying,
  Sure of Heaven as sure as can be,
Spin him round and send him flying
  Off to Hell, a Manichee?

Or, my scrofulous French novel
  On grey paper with blunt type!
Simply glance at it, you grovel
  Hand and foot in Belial's gripe:
If I double down its pages
  At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
  Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

Or, there's Satan! —one might venture
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
Blasted lay that rose-acacia
We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine* . . .
'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratiâ,*
Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r—you swine!"

When we have caught the idea that Mr. Browning is painting the jealous disgust and tricky spite felt by a passionate, sensual, self-indulging, superstitious monk for the pale, blameless, vegetating, contented sort of saint who takes kindly to gardening, and "talks crops" at the monastery table, we see how living and strongly conceived the picture is: but the wording, though vigorous, and one verse at least (that concerning Sanchicha) highly picturesque, is neither melodious nor even very lucid for its purpose; and the parts, as I said, are diminished images of the whole, and hence enigmatic till the whole has been two or three times read. Yet the average of the versification, and the verbal *efficiency* generally, in this little poem, are in power a good deal above those of most of the pieces called "lyrical," chiefly because it is lyrical only in name, and does not attempt to be in form much more than it really is in essence, a semi-dramatic fragment.

Mr. Browning's deficiency in the power of sensuous expression, and in the art of giving an independent interest and attractiveness to the component parts of his poems, as distinguished from the whole, is of course most

strikingly seen in the deficiencies of his metre and rhyme, which are the natural gauge of poetic expressiveness and harmony of poetic structure. A metre that does not fit the movement of the thought gives the painful sense of a man rattling in a case of armour quite too large for him; and rhyme that is only rhyme, and that does not bring with the regular beat of the rhythm something of new power to the sense, annoys with a sense of something artificial, ingenuity at best, interfering with the imaginative effect instead of heightening it. Mr. Browning is never happy in his lyrical metres, and his rhymes have the careless wilful air of being cast off at random by one whom the half-whimsical effect of rhyme stimulates and entertains. His versification is almost always best where it is nearest to prose, where, as in the dramas, the metre is blank verse without rhyme. For example, where else is there in Mr. Browning, for what comes near to lyric fire, anything like that apostrophe which ends the prologue to 'The Ring and the Book,' the first couplet of which has more of the true ring of inspiration then aught else in the whole range of his poems; though in the closing lines he repasses into that over-compressed thought which makes him at times so obscure?—

> "O lyric Love! half-angel and half-bird,
> And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
> Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
> Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
> And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—
> Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—

When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory—to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail, then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:—
Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!"

This is blank verse, and fine blank verse. Elsewhere there is but little elasticity in the rhythm, and rarely indeed, when Mr. Browning tries rhyme, does he use it to effect its legitimate function,—the delicate and definitive *clasping* of thought to thought. Except in 'The Lost Leader,' 'Bringing the Good News from Ghent to Aix,' and one or two other ballads of the same kind, which have a stately gallop in their movement that corresponds well to the movement of the thought, there is hardly a metre or a rhyme in the poems that strikes you by its felicity, and but few, except some of the blank metres, that do not painfully drag or jar. And this deficiency in the *verse* is only the reflection of the deficiencies of the style generally, wherever, at least, it attempts to be lyrical.

Mr. Browning has himself suggested, not perhaps with any conception of the full scope of his remark, the reason why many of his so-called lyrics are unsatisfactory in form; and if we follow the clue his suggestion gives, we shall probably find that it accounts for much both of his great power and great uncouthness. He says, in a note to the first of the 'Lyrics,' "Such poetry as the majority in this volume might also come properly enough, I suppose, under the head of 'Dramatic Pieces;' being, though often Lyric in expression, always Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine." Except that I should prefer to call Mr. Browing semi-dramatic rather than dramatic—as there is always a Browningite style in the voices he gives to his various studies,—and that I take exception to the asserted lyrical expression, this is certainly true. These pieces make an effort to take the lyric shape; but having another essence, they show, by the rasping and the friction of the style that they have somehow got embodied in an unsuitable poetic form. The truth is, I think, that Mr. Browning combines in his own person the *half* of a great dramatist with a large capacity for pure intellectual thought, but has little of that liability to flashes of emotion tingeing his whole creative power, which generates true lyric poetry. His mind seldom or never seems to fall under the dominion of a single sentiment or passion, without which poetry cannot properly be lyric. He can throw himself dramatically into such a mood, but that has an altogether different effect. A

semi-dramatic picture and interpretation of emotion, he can always give; but then this has not the true lyrical spontaneity, ease, singleness of effect; for almost always (usual even in soliloquies) it has direct relation to the minds and actions of others.

Mr. Browning is a dramatic *thinker*,—generally thinking within the imaginative fetters of monologue, even when not throwing his thoughts into that external form; writing with a view to a resisting medium of thought or feeling foreign to that which he is expressing at the moment. You feel that he invariably contemplates some other phase of character, against which his thought has to justify itself, or into the heart of which it has to force an entrance. He is a great imaginative Apologist, rather than either a lyric or dramatic poet. A genuine lyric is not written under the sense of external limits, and with direct reference to the presence of some other form of thought or character. Lyrical poetry is "a law unto itself," defined by its own nature, but without defined end or purpose, falling into shapes due only to the inward harmony of the mind in which it originates, and essentially free from the control of any immediate foreign influence. A lyric is complete in itself, and should justify itself by the perfect individual organisation of its versification.

Why, then, it may well be asked, does a mind which delights so much in these interpretations of character, ever feel tempted to adopt the lyric form? The answer I believe to be because Mr. Browning is only *half* a dramatist—an intellectual apologist for the dramatic part

of life rather than a dramatist—his dramatic powers being controlled entirely by speculative interests, and never hurrying on his imagination deep into the play of those practical forces which constitute the life of a great drama. He does not enter into character as a prelude to the excitement of a conflict, but at most only describes the conflict to illustrate the character. He conceives men in their relation to each other, and in mental collision with each other; but, after all, he does not care which way the battle goes, except so far as that is involved in his interpretation. There is no *narrative* force in him at all. He hardly enters into the story, and even in his dramas—even in 'The Ring and the Book'—evades a plot as far as he possibly can. He has the keenest of all eyes for every qualifying circumstance which alters the point of view of each age and each individual,—but he is never quite dramatic, for we never lose sight of the critical eye of the poet himself, who discriminates all these different shades of thought, and tosses them off with a hardness of outline, and sometimes an intellectual touch of caricature, or a sharp sarcasm, that could not really have proceeded from the *inside* of the situation he is painting for us, that could only proceed from one outside it like himself, but who is looking (very keenly) *into* it. He loves to paint with wonderful swiftness and brilliance, but also with a certain wilful carelessness and singularity,—with somewhat like the qualities shown in old David Cox's fine water-colour sketches,—and with a singular contempt for sweetness and finish of style. In

fertility of intellectual resource there is no poetry anywhere like Mr. Browning's; in the brilliancy of his descriptions of character he has no rival; but for *beauty* of form he seems to me to have almost a contempt.

The consequence is, that he is constantly tempted to throw his dramatic conceptions into a form which rids him altogether of the necessity for a plot. And in order to disguise more effectually the fragmentary character of these pieces torn from their dramatic connexion, they are too often forced into an artificial mould of lyrical shape. Yet, as they are really apologetic monologues addressed to a visionary but half-indicated auditor, the lyrical metres and rhymes are too often the most awkward of artificial accompaniments, which, instead of setting them to a soft melody, give them the easy, familiar, often jaunty recitative, which expresses a lively external criticism. A very short extract will show what I mean: I take it from a poem of fine conception, called 'The Grammarian's Funeral;' the idea of which is to bring out the strong implicit faith in an eternal career which there must be in any man who devotes this life wholly to the preliminary toil of mastering the rudiments of language:—

"Was it not great? Did not he throw on God
(He loves the burthen)
God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?
Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
Just what it all meant?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by instalment!

He ventured neck-or-nothing—heaven's success
Found, or earth's failure:
'Wilt thou trust death, or not?' He answered, 'Yes!
Hence with life's pale lure!'
* * * *
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, through the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
'While he could stammer
He settled ὅτι's business—let it be!
Properly based οὖν—
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic δε
Dead from the waist down."

Now this is a very spirited defence of a grammarian's life; and if the substance of it had fallen naturally into a grammarian's own mouth, instead of being forced out of shape into a kind of hoarse triumphal recitative—chant I cannot call it—over his grave, it might have made a fine dramatic fragment. But as it is, this is in form not meant to be dramatic, but a sort of rhapsody of critical praise. While the thought throughout suggests simply an imaginative effort in the poet's mind to explain and defend the narrow range of a grammarian's studies, the form of the expression tries to pour out a flood of lyrical enthusiasm over him which the writer hardly feels though he *thinks* it, and the striving after which, therefore, comes out in the quick awkward rattle of the jingling metre.

Nothing is easier than to multiply instances of the same kind of blunder in Mr. Browning's so-called lyrics. As a rule, wherever we have a peculiarly jarring metre and jingling rhymes, there Mr. Browning is attempting

to disguise sharp sympathetic criticisms on character in the flowing forms of lyrical melody,—to disguise a speech in a song, to hide the tight garment of apologetic monologue, by throwing over it the easy undress of spontaneous feeling,—in short, to give the effect of "wandering at its own sweet will" to a stream of thought which is strongly and pointedly directed, through a sort of intellectual hose, on a specific object. Here, for instance, is a young lady complaining of her lover for ceasing to care for her, because she had allowed him to see too fully her love for him. She gives expression to a very clever criticism and complaint, but there is no music in her pain; and the attempt to put it into a lyrical form results in a funny compromise between the beat of wings and a firm step, which is rhetorical without being passionate, and critical without being calm:—

"Never any more
While I live,
Need I hope to see his face
As before.
Once his love grown chill,
Mine may strive—
Bitterly we re-embrace,
Single still.

Was it something said,
Something done,
Vexed him? was it touch of hand,
Turn of head?
Strange! that very way
Love begun:
I as little understand
Love's decay.

When I sewed on drew,
I recall
How he looked as if I sung,
—Sweetly too.
If I spoke a word,
First of all
Up his cheek the colour sprung,
Then he heard.

Sitting by my side,
At my feet,
So he breathed the air I breathed,
Satisfied!
I, too, at love's brim
Touched the sweet:
I would die if death bequeathed
Sweet to him.

'Speak, I love thee best!'
He exclaimed.
'Let thy love my own foretell,'
I confessed:
'Clasp my heart on thine
Now unblamed,
Since upon thy soul as well
Hangeth mine!'

Was it wrong to own,
Being truth?
Why should all the giving prove
His alone?
I had wealth and ease,
Beauty, youth—
Since my lover gave me love,
I gave these," &c.

This marked genius of Mr. Browning for interpreting (in his own language, however) character *in position*,—that is, in its most characteristic attitude towards the rest

of the world—is probably the secret not only of his lyrical failures, but of his generally defective powers of poetical expression; for it implies an intellectual basis for his dramatic power, and suggests that Mr. Browning is rather a highly-intellectual interpreter of action, throwing himself into a new part, and feeling its characteristic points, as a good rider just feels his horse's mouth with the bit,—or, to use a better image, perhaps, throwing out all his nervous perception into the defining outline and moral profile of his part, as a blind man will finger the contour of a face that is dear to him, to secure his image of the characteristic lines,—rather than that he works, like Shakespeare or Goethe, by intense sympathy from within, leaving the final outline to crystallise as it may, according to the internal law and nature of the life thus germinating in his imagination.

And no doubt the basis of Mr. Browning's whole genius is keenly intellectual,—not meditatively intellectual, but, on the contrary, observingly, definingly, speculatively intellectual,—of which we may see one great proof in the usually far superior character of his masculine to his feminine sketches, of his "men" to his "women," though I must except here the saint of 'The Ring and the Book.' Educated *men's* characters are naturally *in position*, and most vigorous masculine characters of any kind have a defined bearing on the rest of the world, a characteristic attitude, a personal latitude and longitude on the map of human affairs, which an intellectual eye can seize and mark out at once.

But it is not so usually with women's characters. They are best expressed not by attitude and outline, but by essence and indefinite tone. As an odour expresses and characterises a flower even better than its shape and colour, as the note of a bird is in some sense a more personal expression of it than its form and feathers; so there is something of vital essence in a great poet's delineations of women which is far more expressive than any outline or colour. When Shakespeare makes Cleopatra say, over the body of Antony,

> "And there is nothing left remarkable
> Beneath the visiting moon,"

he somehow contrives to embody in a sentence the concentrated essence of the imperial and voluptuous queen. When Goethe makes Klärchen, in 'Egmont,' sing,

> "Freudvoll und leidvoll,
> Gedankenvoll sein,
> Langen und bangen,
> In schwebender Pein,
> Himmeloch jauchzend,
> Zum Tode betrübt,
> Glücklich allein
> Ist die Seele, die liebt,"—

he has given you the whole character in an aroma of brief but surpassing sweetness. There is no trace of this power in Mr. Browning. He throws his feminine characters into as strongly-defined attitudes as his masculine, and the consequence is, that they are seldom nearly so effective; and also that, half-conscious of this intellectual-

ising mould of his mind, he attempts them very much less often. He has drawn women, indeed, of a certain grandeur of outline,—as, for instance, the guilty Ottima, in "Pippa passes," who stimulates her lover to the murder of her husband, and then asks him to crown her his queen, his "spirit's arbitress, magnificent in sin;" but the picture is painfully inflamed, and though it impresses one as true, it is because, under such exceptional circumstances, the pronounced attitude which Mr. Browning loves to draw is to be found even more sharply defined in the passionate woman, fearful that the guilt may alienate love, than in the most masculine of men. And no one can mistake the peculiar abrupt Browningite style in which Ottima, like all Mr. Browning's characters, phrases her monologue :—

Otti. "Well, then, I love you better now than ever,
And best (look at me while I speak to you)—
Best for the crime; nor do I grieve, in truth,
This mask, this simulated ignorance,
This affectation of simplicity,
Falls off our crime; this naked crime of ours
May not, now, be looked over: look it down, then!
Great? let it be great; but the joys it brought,
Pay they or no its price? Come: they or it!
Speak not! The Past, would you give up the Past
Such as it is, pleasure and crime together?
Give up that noon I owned my love for you?
The garden's silence! even the single bee
Persisting in his toil, suddenly stopt;
And where he hid you only could surmise
By some campanula's chalice set a-swing:
Who stammered—'Yes, I love you?'"

It is essentially an intellectual picture; a passionate

attitude, with its swollen veins and starting muscles, delineated crisply by an abruptly intellectual mind. And of the only other feminine pictures that strike me at all, 'Pompilia' excepted, of whom I must speak separately, —those, namely, in the fine piece called 'In a Balcony,'— it may be equally said that though they are not perhaps overdrawn, they are drawn on the stretch, and not in the tone in which women most naturally express themselves. Even 'Pompilia' is intellectualised and over-sharply defined in the monologue in which her critic makes her speak. Mr. Browning's power is always most naturally expended in drawing masculine characters in intellectually defined relations to the rest of the world.

And, again, this defective, because too intellectual, basis of Mr. Browning's powers of expression betrays itself clearly in his choice of language. In that strange freak of creative self-will, 'Sordello,' which probably no man or woman except the author ever yet understood,—I do not at all doubt that he understands his own drift clearly enough,—there are one or two flashes of intelligible thought which give one some insight into Mr. Browning's own troubles. Sordello is an ambitious poet of the ancient Troubadour type and times, divided with himself whether he should try to influence the world directly or only through his song. And it is the psychological history of this conflict which Mr. Browning apparently wishes to describe. One of Sordello's first difficulties, during his poetic period, in getting at mankind, is, language. He is oppressed apparently (like

our Lake poets of the end of the last century) by the unreal character of the poetic phraseology, and he leaves off imagining for a season, to see if he can make something more effective of the medium through which his imaginations must be presented to the world :—

> " He left imagining, to try the stuff
> That held the imaged thing, and—let it writhe
> Never so fiercely—scarce allowed a tithe
> To reach the light,—his Language."

Certainly Sordello was quite right in supposing that this was the great obstacle to his fame, if we have any measure of his powers of expression in this poem ; for a more completely opaque medium than the wording either of his own thoughts or of the author's thoughts about him, Talleyrand himself would have failed to invent. However, it is something that he so keenly felt the obscurity, while the attempt to remedy it, and the reason of the failure, are instructive :—

> " How he sought
> The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought
> That Language,—welding words into the crude
> Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude
> Armour was hammered out, in time to be
> Approved beyond the Roman panoply
> Melted to make it,—boots not. This obtained
> With some ado, no obstacle remained
> To using it ; accordingly he took
> An action with its actors, quite forsook
> Himself to live in each, returned anon
> With the result—a creature, and, by one
> And one, proceeded leisurely to equip
> Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.

> 'Accomplished! Listen, Mantuans!' Fond essay!
> Piece after piece that armour broke away,
> Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
> To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
> As language: thought may take perception's place,
> But hardly co-exist in any case,
> Being its mere presentment—of the whole
> By parts, the simultaneous and the sole
> By the successive and the many."

Whether this expresses Sordello's process of poetical construction or not, I strongly suspect that it expresses Mr. Browning's. To cast his language, like bronze armour, in moulds of its own; to conceive and imagine in a separate intellectual world far removed from this verbal armour of the imagination, and then bring "the result, a creature," to have the armour of language "leisurely" fitted on to it; and finally to find that armour break away,

> "Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
> To clothe, *reject so pure a work of thought*
> *As language*,"—

seems to me a very graphic, though not very poetical—in one small respect only erroneous—account of Mr. Browning's own struggles with the difficulties of poetic expression. I say, in one respect erroneous, because it is only to intellects like Mr. Browning's that language *is* "so pure a work of thought;" and to them only because they see mainly the intellectual side of language, and look at its defined meanings so much more than its often far more vital undefined associations. Instead of lan-

guage being too pure a work of thought to clothe Mr. Browning's perceptions adequately, it would be nearer the truth to say that his perceptions are too much overruled and concentrated by thought to admit of the most poetical use of language.

This may seem obscure; but I can explain what I mean about Mr. Browning's style, and I think justify it, in a few words. Every one must have noticed that the style introduced by Mr. Carlyle is far from poetical, and yet in the highest degree picturesque, while also open to the charge of being not a little obscure. It is a style the essence of which consists in driving your perceptions into the service of your intellect, and talking a sort of hieroglyphic, every picturesque symbol in which expresses a thought. Thus, to open Mr. Carlyle at random: "To such length can transcendental moonshine, cast by some morbidly radiating Coleridge into the chaos of a fermenting life, act magically there, and produce divulsions and convulsions and diseased developments. So dark and abstruse, without lamp or authentic finger-post, is the course of pious genius towards the eternal kingdoms grown." Here we have the rather ordinary thought that the "high philosophy of a genius like Coleridge's is able to cast a charm over minds in difficulty and doubt, and persuade them this way and that, when they have no really safe guide to look to,"—illuminated, like the old missals, by a little series of images, in which vision is made the instrument for sharply emphasizing thought. Here is a style crowded

with stress, and making the same kind of fatiguing impression on the mind which a handwriting sloped the wrong way makes on the eye,—an impression of strain and effort. It is therefore apt to be obscure, and certain not to be poetical, for one and the same reason,—namely, that over-emphasis is both exhausting and unnatural; and while an exhausted attention is necessarily enveloped by a mist of obscurity, emphasis too crowded for nature misses the under-tones and the neutral tints which are absolutely essential to the harmony of poetry.

Now, of course, I do not mean to say that Mr. Browning's style is the illuminated style of Mr. Carlyle. He is too much of a poet for such disproportion of the picturesque, such fatiguing gold-and-crimson. But it is true that his style also is fatiguing and destitute of lower tints and under-tones, and that when he is pictorial, as he very often is, he crowds and emphasizes the striking points, so as to miss the harmony of poetry. It gives one the impression of a vigilant intellect noting all the principal features of the scene acutely, and concentrating his perceptive faculties so completely in the gaze of attention as to miss those numberless under-growths of half-dreamy observation which constitute so great a charm of poetic insight. Mr. Browning's style is too keen, too restless, too startling,—his soul is too much in his eyes, his mind too devoid of that *lazy* receptiveness which fills-in and softens and warms the effect of the whole,—for a really high poetic style. Compare, for

instance, his purely descriptive talent, which is highly picturesque, but not poetical, with Tennyson. Thus Mr. Browning describes a lunar rainbow :—

> "For lo, what think you? suddenly
> The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
> Received at once the full fruition
> Of the moon's consummate apparition.
> The black cloud-barricade was riven,
> Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
> Deep in the West; while, bare and breathless,
> North and South and East lay ready
> For a glorious Thing, that, dauntless, deathless,
> Sprang across them, and stood steady.
> 'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
> From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
> As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
> It rose, distinctly at the base
> With its seven proper colours chorded,
> Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
> Until at last they coalesced,
> And supreme the spectral creature lorded
> In a triumph of whitest white,—
> Above which intervened the night.
> But above night too, like only the next,
> The second of a wondrous sequence,
> Reaching in rare and rarer frequence,
> Till the heaven of heavens were circumflext,
> Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
> Fainter, flushier, and flightier,
> Rapture dying along its verge!
> Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
> WHOSE, from the straining topmost dark,
> On to the keystone of that arc?"

This is powerful, keen-eyed, piercing,—too much of all these for the harmony of poetry. The style is to the poetic style like the secondary rainbow to the primary,

"fainter, flushier, and flightier:" "fainter," because the colours are washed on with a thin hasty hand; "flushier," because they come and go with a certain flush of attentive perception that subsides back into pure thought; and "flightier," from the abrupt breathless air of the whole metre. The sense of rest which a still lunar rainbow after a storm should produce on the heart is entirely absent. Tennyson also is one of the greatest of poetic painters; but how much of the still undergrowth of perception, or rather reception, which does not, nay cannot, come if you watch for it, which steals into the brooding mind when the attention is relaxed and the mind's eye half shut, is there in every fragment of his descriptions! Take a fragment from 'In Memoriam,' for instance:

> "Doors, where my heart was used to beat
> So quickly, not as one that weeps
> I come once more; the city sleeps
> I smell the meadow in the street.
>
> I hear a chirp of birds; I see
> Betwixt the black fronts long withdrawn
> A light-blue lane of early morn,
> And think of early days and thee."

That is poetry in which the brooding, silent, receptive mind drinks in much that the restless eye and ear could never catch; that *absorbs* the silence as well as the sound, the middle tints as well as the flashes of light and colour. And the want of this power in Mr. Browning seems to me to show that for him language is not in reality "too pure a work of thought" to contain his

perceptions, but that his perceptions are too pure a work of thought, too full of vigilant intellectual activity, to give him the full command of the associative charms and latent riches of language. His imagination is impatient; it never *broods*.

And hence, too, all the obscurity of style there is in Mr. Browning; and in some of his works it is predominant. It is mere abruptness and hurry, the rapid sketchy accumulation of a host of notes from his mental notebook tumbling one upon the other in a bewildering crowd. In the dramas, where Mr. Browning's genius better corresponds to the form of his thought, and in the confessedly semi-dramatic fragments called 'Men and Women,' and in the monologues of 'The Ring and the Book' where there is no effort to be lyrical, nothing can be more lucid and simple than his style, so soon as you have once found your true latitude and caught the spirit of the situation. The only really unintelligible poem is 'Sordello,' and that not because there is any great mysticism, as far as I can see, in the substance of what the poet wishes to say, but because it is elliptical, laconic, crowded with hints, and pronouns which may belong to half a dozen distinct nouns; because it is a mere *tangle* of thought. It reads like a corrupt edition of an old poem, in which the very language has got into hopeless confusion. Mr. Browning has attempted to guide the guesses of his readers by a running head-line to the pages, directing their attention to his real drift: but, after all, this can do but little, and I suspect that, if it

be true, as his dedication appears to indicate, that there is really one mortal who to his own satisfaction has understood him, it would be found on cross-examination of that one, that (like Hegel's sole philosophical confidant) even he has *mis*understood him.

To illustrate the crowded note-book style, take this, which I give without context, because I only care to call attention to the marvellous *grammatical* difficulty of this helter skelter of words trooping on each other's heels :—

> "If thus with warrant to rescind
> The ignominious exile of mankind—
> Whose proper service, ascertained intact,
> As yet (to be by him themselves made act,
> Not watch Sordello acting each of them)
> Was to secure—if the true diadem
> Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank
> The wisdom of that golden Palma,—thank
> Verona's Lady in her Citadel
> Founded by Gaulish Brennus, legends tell:
> And truly when she left him, the sun reared
> A head like the first clamberer's that peered
> A-top the Capitol, his face on flame
> With triumph, triumphing till Manlius came."

Now, whoever can construe this, I confess myself altogether unable to do so. What, for instance, the parenthetic

> "to be by him themselves made act,
> Not watch Sordello acting each of them,"

means, I have not the most distant notion. Mr. Browning might as well have said, "to be by him her himself herself themselves made act," &c., for any vestige of

meaning I attach to this curious mob of pronouns and verbs. It is exactly like the short notes of a speech intended to be interpreted afterwards by one who had heard and understood it himself. The style is faulty from no mysticism, but sheer impatience. And this is the case in large portions even of other poems.

But I have devoted enough, perhaps more than enough, space to the discussion of Mr. Browning's poetic deficiencies. They mark distinctly the limits of his imaginative power, which is nevertheless very high. In range of thought he certainly far surpasses *all* his poetic contemporaries, and in vividness of conception he is second to none but Mr. Tennyson, though certainly his inferior. To a considerable extent he has lost merited popularity by belonging neither to this country nor to this time. Saturated with foreign, and especially with Italian, culture, possessed by the human genius, though keenly alive to the falsehoods of Roman Catholicism, and occupying himself with both forms of character and modes of thought that seem more native to the middle ages than to modern England,—Mr. Browning's poems have naturally failed to take as yet their true level in English literature. Still, the place they do take is undoubtedly a very high one, and is likely to rise the more thoroughly he is studied.

I have said that Mr. Browning's chief power lies in the intellectual side of drama,—the semi-dramatic delineation of characters, especially of masculine characters, in their most characteristic relation to the world, but that his

interest in the dramatic "situation" is purely intellectual, and fails therefore to impart any vigorous movement or practical excitement to the plot. I must add, that there is one cardinal interest which so greatly overpowers all others in Mr. Browning's creations that it forms more or less the staple interest of all his best poems, and not only explains his wonderful artistic grasp of the genius of the Catholic Church, but gives an additional reason why the living centre of his imaginative power is generally in a *man's* mind, and but seldom in a woman's heart.

Mr. Browning has the keenest sympathy with the passion for knowledge, at least for the knowledge of living minds, of man, and God; and has, too, an intuitive sense of how easily human knowledge and worldly wisdom take the place of spiritual knowledge and divine wisdom, and how subtly they mingle in all the more artful and politic forms of character. It is evident how much a long residence in the country of Machiavelli and Cavour, and a close study of the ecclesiastical wisdom, craft, and subtlety produced by the system of the confessional, must intensify his interest in this border land between the supernatural and the worldly wisdom. I had noted this long before the publication of 'The Ring and the Book,' the crowning work of Mr. Browning's genius, to which, however, this remark especially applies. The command of motives which is given by a constant study of the secrets of the heart, either for saintly and mystical or for worldly and selfish reasons, is

necessarily of the same order of practical importance; and none knows better than Mr. Browning how strangely they interweave. By far the greatest intellectual fascination of his poems consists in his marvellous mastery of the infinitely various compounds between the religious and the worldly wisdom, and the deep awe that both alike, in their higher degrees, whether pure or blended, inspire in the simpler minds over which they cast their influence. Every one of the greater poems includes in some shape—very seldom indeed involving a repetition, for Mr. Browning's power of dramatic variation of this theme is endless—a study of some striking conflict or some still more striking combination between the craft of the visible world and the craft of the invisible, and of the many threads of connexion between the two.

Mr. Browning's early poem, 'Paracelsus,' which bears all the marks of youth, is nothing but a study of the craving for a knowledge of the absolute principle of life in the mind of a mediæval aspirant who might have hoped eventually to attain such knowledge. The poem is one of the least successful, because it wants the local colour peculiar to the life of the middle ages, and the intimate knowledge of the ambitious heart and intellect which the later poems abundantly show. Paracelsus aspires at first only to absolute *knowledge;* when, after long wanderings, his heart is beginning to fail him, he meets a true poet, who in like manner has aspired passionately to love, and has failed even more bitterly than Paracelsus in attaining the fulfilment of his desire.

From him Paracelsus learns that true life consists in seeking to blend love for man with knowledge (however incomplete) of the laws of man's life; and accordingly begins to devote himself to teaching (at Basle) what little he knows. Then comes the temptation to affect more knowledge than he has, in order to gain a fit audience for what he has, and the consequent dabbling in pretended magic. The only powerful part of the poem consists in the delineation of the strange mixture of self-scorn and self-belief,—the compunction for affecting false powers, and the lingering faith in a transcendental method of mastering the secret of life,—the conviction that God disapproves his pious frauds to gain influence with the world, and that He approves the effort to teach and serve the world, which seems to necessitate them. This struggle, no doubt, is finely delineated. The bitter hope that even in *cheating* the world for its good Paracelsus is doing better than in mere solitary study without any attempt to serve it; at all events, that thus, if not doing "most good," he is yet effecting "least harm;" the almost cynical remonstrance with God for not showing him his way clearer,—are all powerfully drawn :—

> "You little fancy what rude shocks apprise us
> We sin: *God's intimations rather fail*
> *In clearness than in energy:* 'twere well
> Did they but indicate the course to take,
> Like that to be forsaken."

That is a very fine expression of the half-angry, half-mournful disappointment of a proud and shadowy,

mind; and all this portion of 'Paracelsus,' where he is openly and furiously at war with himself for the false assumption of secret lore by which he renders his teaching popular, and with God for not either giving him knowledge enough to do without falsehood, or else at least relieving him from the heavy obligation to teach others with the imperfect knowledge he has, is strikingly brought out. But, on the whole, 'Paracelsus' appears to me vague and unimpressive in execution, though not perhaps in the design.

Mr. Browning's favourite, and perhaps highest, exercise of art, however, is shown in the various delineations of the worldly force of ecclesiastical dignities struggling with, or flavouring, the Catholic faith. Of this he has given us many and very remarkable dramatic pictures, ranging from the childish, full-fed, superstitious, sensual-creeded "bishop, who orders his tomb at St. Praxed's church," to the diabolic rat-like craft of Count Guido—the half-ecclesiastical layman of 'The Ring and the Book,' —or the passionate contrast drawn by Canon Caponsacchi in the same great poem, between the life of the fashionable preacher and the heart of the true saint. And these are but three out of many studies of the same genus, though different species. I scarcely know whether the St. Praxed's bishop's flushed *physical* appetite for the splendid Roman Catholic rites, or the keen laughing twinkle that glitters in the eyes of aged Legates and Nuncios, whom Mr. Browning depicts in their dealings with captious children of the Church, is

the more powerfully painted. No painting can be more striking than the pleading of the dying bishop with his own natural sons to fulfil their pledge to him in giving him a tomb of jasper handsomer than that of his rival Gandolf, who died before him, with an inscription of purer Latinity:—

> "Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then!
> 'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
> My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
> One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
> There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
> And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
> Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
> And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
> —That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
> Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
> No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
> Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
> And then how I shall lie through centuries,
> And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
> And see God made and eaten all day long,
> And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
> Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!"

The piece is full of passionate superstition, voluptuous and intellectually dramatic; but the shades of thought in it are, perhaps less delicate and difficult to draw than in some other of Mr. Browning's ecclesiastical sketches. Perhaps the most striking contrast to it, showing, in its way, equal art and insight, is the wonderful picture of the Göttingen Professor and his Christmas Eve discourse, on the mythical character of Christianity, in 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day.' There you have

the thin intellectual ghost, or hardly distinguishable shadow, of Christian faith, in the place of the high-fed body of superstition we have just seen; and each is painted with such strict dramatic truth, that one scarcely knows whether one is most fascinated by the picture of the faith which steams with the "burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts," or of the faded and pallid rationalism that seems just disappearing into the inane,—

> "That sallow, virgin-minded, studious
> Martyr to mild enthusiasm,
> As he uttered a kind of cough preludious,
> That woke my sympathetic spasm
> (Beside some spitting that made me sorry),
> And stood surveying his auditory,
> With a wan pure look well nigh celestial,—
> Those blue eyes had survived so much."

No theological student in a German university can miss the type; and the lines which follow might certainly have been painted from personal experience:—

> "He pushed back higher his spectacles,
> Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,
> And giving his head of hair—a hake
> Of undressed tow for colour and quality—
> One rapid and impatient shake,
> * * * *
> The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,
> Broke into his Christmas Eve's discourse."

This discourse, no less than the portrait, is a striking pendant to the delirious address of the bishop of St. Praxed to his sons, as it explains,

"How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
Fact into fable, fit for the clime,
Had by slow and sure degrees translated it
Into this myth, this Individuum,—
Which, when reason had strained and abated it
Of foreign matter, gave for residuum
A Man!—a right true man, however,
Whose work was worthy a man's endeavour."

And Mr. Browning's subtle and striking criticism on his Göttingen Professor's mythological lecture, though apparently needless for the portrait, really adds its most effective touch, when he concludes it by saying to his lecturer:—

"Go on, you shall no more move my gravity
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse,
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them."

The whole picture of the exhausted intellectual receiver in the professor's mind, of his constant effort to remove husks till the grain was gone, and of his cough, which,

"Like a drouthy piston,
Tried to dislodge the husk, that grew to him,"—

is completed by this hint, that if you could get at the centre of his mind, his weary and wan and joyless air would be explained by the constant spiritual labour of actually carrying "what he says carries him."

A poem quite as impressive from its strange mixture of physical and voluptuous passions (richly set in an artistic nature), with an implicit faith in all the legends

of the Church, is the sketch of the Florentine monk and artist, Fra Lippo Lippi. His promise to himself of how he will atone for his irregularities of life, and paint the fashion of his pardon, is one of the most powerful conceptions in all Mr. Browning's poems :—

> "I shall paint
> God in the midst. Madonna and her babe,
> Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
> Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
> As puff on puff of grated orris-root,
> When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
> And then in the front, of course a saint or two—
> Saint John, because he saves the Florentines ;
> Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
> The convent's friends and gives them a long day."

Into this saintly crowd, secured at their devotions, the artist is to introduce himself in his old serge gown, coming "as one by a dark stair into a great light," "mazed, motionless, and moonstruck," and looking anxiously for escape :—

> "Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
> Forward, puts out a soft palm—'Not so fast!'
> —Addresses the celestial presence, 'nay—
> He made you and devised you, after all,
> Though he's none of you ! Could Saint John there, draw—
> His camel-hair make up a painting-brush ?
> We come to brother Lippo for all that,
> *Iste perfecit opus !*' So, all smile—
> I shuffle sideways with my blushing face,
> Under the cover of a hundred wings
> Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
> And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
> Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
> The hothead husband !"

This, of course, though a wholly different picture, is closely akin to the St. Praxed bishop in intellectual conception; showing the same strong mixture of eager fleshly naturalism beneath the robe of superstitious awe; but it is the infinitely varied transformations under which Mr. Browning can present the same elements, which prove how great an intellectual interpreter of human nature he is.

The intermediate place between the bishop of St. Praxed and the Göttingen Professor, but embodying also some of the shrewd political instinct which Mr. Browning so subtly and thoroughly penetrates, is "Bishop Blougram," who gives us a rather too extended apology for continuing to hold his place in the Catholic hierarchy, though admitting that a large part of its creed is either doubtful or false to him. Nothing can exceed the tortuous sophistry of this admirable special pleading; but for the subject of a work of art it is a bad one, presenting too few points of living interest, and lying wholly in the leaden-coloured region where moral fallacies have their roots. It ought to interest deeply clergymen in a false position; but few else will recognise the marvellous minuteness and fidelity of this Denner-like painting of every wrinkle on the ecclesiastical conscience, and every pucker in its understanding. Of course it is all translated as usual by Mr. Browning into his own dialect.

The most wonderful picture of the ecclesiastical politician and diplomatist is certainly the pontifical

legate Ogniben, in 'A Soul's Tragedy,' who trots into a papal town to suppress a popular revolution, alone on muleback, humming "*Cur fremuere gentes?*" and saying, as he laughs gently to himself, "I have known three-and-twenty leaders of revolts." The acute knowledge of human motives, and still acuter manipulation of them, which this not unkindly old man shows; the courage and the real spiritual power over man which the confessional has given him, at the expense of course of uprightness; the Socratic address with which he draws out the selfish ambition in the new leader of revolt, and lures him with it into renouncing the popular cause, and finally disposes of him in words curiously mingling a genuine kind of piety, not unascetic, with ecclesiastical craft, concluding with, "I have known *four*-and-twenty leaders of revolts,"—constitutes one of the most subtle and striking pictures of modern imagination. The pity is that all the subsidiary characters—even Chiappino, the leader of revolt, himself, who is not ill-conceived—are as usual so far inferior to this figure, that, even without regard to the Browningite dialect, in which all alike speak, the drama is a poor one, though the intellectual conception is inimitable.

Nor is it only the intersecting line between worldly and spiritual wisdom that Mr. Browning traces so finely. The jealous hatred of the bishop of St. Praxed for his rival Gandolf, and the first extract I made for another purpose from his poems, called 'The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,' both show how finely he can conceive

the union of earthly passions with monastic and ritual ideas. The same power is shown with much more of poetic form and expression, in the short piece called 'A Heretic's Tragedy,' though here the picture is of the blending of inquisitorial cruelty with the passionate bigotry of faith. The triumphant joy of vindicating the Infinite Justice in those who apply the torture to the recusant heretic, the pitiless gaiety which the natural cruelty of savage natures engrafts thereon, directly the belief that the suffering is *deserved* absolves them from the duty of sympathy, the fine shading-off of the consciousness of wreaking a divine retribution into common human brutality,—mark a work of rare art.

But the most characteristic of all Mr. Browning's ecclesiastical poems is that powerful picture of Roman society and casuistry, in the days of Innocent XII., which he has given us in his latest and in many respects his finest poem, 'The Ring and the Book.' The story itself is easily told. Mr. Browning found on a bookstall in Florence,—the description of the scene of the discovery is one of the most graphic passages of the poem,—amidst much rubbish, an old book, part print, part MS., purporting to be the actual pleadings in a Roman murder case of the year 1698, in which one Count Guido Franceschini, of Arezzo, with four cutthroats in his pay, murdered his wife, a girl of seventeen years who had a fortnight ago borne him an heir, and with her the old couple who had brought her up, and who had at first given themselves out as her parents. The Count and

his four accomplices were arrested before the death of the wife (Pompilia), who survived her wounds four days. Count Guido pleaded, first, that the murder was a justifiable vindication of his honour, since his wife had fled from his house to Rome with a certain handsome priest, Canon Caponsacchi, and had been incited to this crime by the old couple who had brought her up, and who had passed themselves off on her husband as her parents. To this the prosecuting counsel rejoined that Guido, by his horrible cruelty and treachery, had deliberately set a trap for her, intending to drive her from his home in this Canon's company, in order that he himself might get a divorce and still keep her property,—that the girl was pure of all guilt, and that the letters produced as hers to Caponsacchi had been deliberately forged by the husband, she herself being unable either to read or write;—on which the judgment of the tribunal was death to Guido and his accomplices. Thereupon, however, there was an appeal to the Pope in person, as Count Guido, though a layman, had taken some steps towards holy orders, and was to a certain slight extent entitled to the special privileges of the priesthood; whereupon the good old Pope, Innocent XII., then eighty-six years of age, and near his end, reviewed the case himself, at the instance, amongst others, of the emperor's envoy, who took the side of Count Guido. After reviewing the case, the Pope ordered the execution to take place immediately, in the most public spot in Rome.

Such is the mere skeleton of the story. Mr. Browning

makes it, after his fashion, the occasion for a rich and shrewd semi-dramatic picture of all the various influences at work in the Roman society of the day; of the provincial society in the country towns of the Pope's dominions; of the poor nobility, the hangers-on of the Church, who danced attendance on the Cardinals, hoping for profitable sinecures; of the professional Roman lawyers, deep in ecclesiastical precedents and Ciceronian eloquence and in the verses of Horace and Ovid, who pleaded in the case; of the eloquent and brilliant worldly Churchman of the time, part priest, part fashionable poet; and finally, of the populace of Rome itself. Mr. Browning gives us the view taken of this great case from all sides. He gives the view favourable to Count Guido, taken by one-half of Rome, and the view unfavourable to his victim, taken by the other half of Rome. He gives us the critical Cardinal's view of the pending trial as developed in refined Roman drawing-rooms; the criminal's own defence; the dying wife's statement of her own case; the speech of the handsome young Canon who took her away from Count Guido's cruelty at Arezzo; the lawyers' pleadings on either side; finally, the working of the old Pope's mind on the day when he gives the final judgment: then Count Guido's last confession; and last, the poet's own final presentation of the pure gold of the tragedy, set free from all the alloys of accidental one-sided criticism.

I can remember nothing which has at once so much force and fire, and also so much of the subtlety of intel-

lectual drama,—intellectual rendering, that is, by Mr. Browning himself, of his own study of the characters of others,—in any other of his writings as many parts of this great poem,—especially those painting Count Guido, Canon Caponsacchi, the betrayed Pompilia, and the broad-Church Pope Innocent XII. Even the finest passion in "Pippa Passes" is not so rich and eloquent as the defence poured out by Caponsacchi of the murdered Pompilia, nor is the "soliloquy in the Spanish cloister" so expressive of the spite of venomous cunning, as Count Guido Franceschini's defence of himself, and malignant insinuations against his wife and her parents and Caponsacchi. Of course, there is an obvious defect in dramatic keeping, in putting into the mouth of a man just fresh from the torture, so astute, elaborate, and ecclesiastical a dissertation on the evidence which had been produced; to which it may be added that, except as to passion and force, the style (*i.e.*, in construction and illustration) of Count Guido Franceschini is scarcely to be distinguished from that of the Canon Caponsacchi. But this is always so with Mr. Browning. He only aims at giving a complete reflexion of his various characters in his own forms of thought, and as he only aims at this, the mere circumstance of putting a subtle speech of 2000 lines into the mouth of a man fresh from the torture is no falsification of the artistic intention,—which is, to give the drift of his defence, supposed to be confided to Mr. Browning, just as his poetic confidant may deem most effective.

What is there in modern imaginations finer than the contrast between the shifty ecclesiastical intrigue, the rat-like voracity and cunning, the craft formed and trained in the attempt to squeeze promotion out of bishops and cardinals, in a word, the half-tricky, half-subtle Pharisaism of the Tuscan Count, who had been familiar with the Roman Courts all his life and knew the *worst* side at least of every judge before him, and the passionate despair of the ardent young priest who, summoned back to Rome to hear that Pompilia was dying by the dagger of her husband, throws all reserve to the winds, pours out his own loathing of his early life of fashionable frivolity, describes the awakening of a divine nature in him through the influence of Pompilia's saintly sweetness and purity, and tells in burning words the story of Guido's loathsome attempt to force his wife into infidelity, of her flight to Rome under his own protection, and of the words which fell from her from time to time during the journey, stamped as they are on the face of the different landscapes and different skies which his eye happened to take in as they were uttered? Mr. Browning's picture of this passionate human love stirring in the heart of a fashionable, frivolous, and dissipated, but still noble unspoiled nature, and awakening it at one and the same time to the holiness of the priest's desecrated faith and calling, and to the unearthly beauty of her whom he could not but half love with earthly rapture and half adore with a worship very like the true Catholic cultus of the Madonna, is to me the finest effort of Mr.

Browning's genius. But it would scarcely produce the effect it does upon one, did it not so immediately succeed the exposition of the venomous and cunning sleight-of-mind with which Count Guido tries to persuade his judges that wounded honour and burning shame have instigated all his own coldly and craftily calculated actions towards his wife and her parents, and have left him with a good and quiet conscience even after the triple murder. As we follow the intellectual writhings of Count Guido's ingenious special pleadings, which skilfully evade the most critical tests of his guilt, and make it their aim, instead, to put the judges off the scent and convince them beyond refutation of his wife's shame, trusting that, if he can manage that, the palliation of his own guilt must follow as a natural consequence, we almost lose the meaning of the words 'truth' and 'falsehood,' and seem to sink lower and lower into an abyss of sophistry and simulated passion, with only a glimmer here and there of genuine Satanic spite to remind us of where we are.

Pompilia is a figure at once of the most original and simplest school of art. It has something of the loveliness of Raffaelle's Madonna della Seggia about it, but with more both of the child and of the saint. I doubt if Mr. Browning's fame will be perpetuated by any of his intellectual studies so long. Her husband, a murderer, calls her the "pale poison my hasty hunger took for food," and speaks of her as like one of the favourite figures of Fra Angelico,—

> "Who traces you some timid chalky ghost,
> That turns the church into a charnel. Ay,
> Just such a pencil might depict my wife."

But that, of course, is the libel of the malignant and greedy man, who can value nothing without a spice of wickedness in it, nothing that is not willing and even anxious, to take a taint in his foul service. But the Pope understands her thoroughly. He makes it her special praise that having been "obedient to the end," "dutiful to the foolish parents first," "submissive next to the bad husband," she could, nevertheless,—

> "Rise from law to law,
> The old to the new, promoted at one cry
> O' the trump of God to the new service, not
> To longer bear, but henceforth fight,—be found
> Sublime in new impatience with the foe:
> Endure man and obey God; plant firm foot
> On neck of man, tread man into the hell
> Meet for him, and obey God all the more."

There is alacrity, even valour, at the bottom of Pompilia, in spite of what her husband calls the "timid chalky ghost" in her: she can seize his sword and point it at his breast when his cruelty and malignity pass all bounds; and even he feels this. Mr. Browning, in what is perhaps the only *purely* dramatic passage in his whole great poem, makes Guido, when at last the procession enters his cell to lead him away to execution, call out in his last agony of terror:—

> "Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria, God. . . . .
> Pompilia! will you let them murder me?'

—Pompilia standing at the very climax of his thought of everything Godlike, in spite of the fury of his hate. To her, dead, he appeals as to a power almost beyond God's, to save him. And yet, with this high valour at the bottom of her, no more simple "womanchild," as the old Pope finely calls her, was ever painted than Pompilia,—simple alike in her religious maternal love for the boy to whom she gave birth just a fortnight before her own murder, and in the confession of the pure depth and intensity of her devotion to the young priest who saved her from her husband, and for whose purity of soul she fights as for her own. The Pope speaks of her as of a wayside flower that

> "Breaks all into blaze,
> Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
> To incorporate the whole great sun it loves,
> From the inch-height whence it looks and longs."

And then look how finely the religious passion of the mother's heart is expressed :—

> "I never realized God's birth before—
> How he grew likest God in being born.
> This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
> Lying a little on my breast like hers."

And this, again, for the spiritual perfection of maternal love, is scarcely equalled in our language :—

> "Even for my babe, my boy, there's safety thence—
> From the sudden death of me, I mean : we poor
> Weak souls, how we endeavour to be strong !
> I was already using up my life,—
> This portion, now, should do him such a good,

This other go to keep off such an ill!
The great life; see, a breath and it is gone!
So is detached, so left all by itself
The little life, the fact which means so much.
Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,
His marvel of creation, foot would crush,
Now that the hand He trusted to receive
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?
The better; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearlier: if my babe
Outlive the hour—and he has lived two weeks—
It is through God who knows I am not by.
Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black,
And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,
Trying to talk? Let us leave God alone!
Why should I doubt He will explain in time
What I feel now, but fail to find the words?"

Taken as a whole, the figure of Pompilia seems to me a masterpiece of delicate power. Passionate tenderness with equally passionate purity, submissiveness to calamity with strenuousness against evil, the trustfulness of a child with the suffering of a martyr, childishness of intellect with the visionary insight of a saint, all tinged with the ineffably soft colouring of an Italian heaven, breathe in every touch and stroke of this great picture.

The old Pope affords a subject much easier, I should suppose, for Mr. Browning to draw. It is a very fine figure. There is in it all the mark of venerable age, except any failure of intellectual power. The flashes of intellectual and spiritual light are of the thin, bright, auroral kind. Take, for instance, the passage in which the gallant old man deliberates whether he shall or shall

not dare condemn the aristocratic murderer to his rightful fate :—

> "As I know,
> I speak,—what should I know, then, and how speak
> Were there a wild mistake of eye or brain
> In the recorded governance above?
> If my own breath, only, blew coal alight,
> I, called celestial and the morning star?
> I, who in this world act resolvedly,
> Dispose of men, the body and the soul,
> As they acknowledge or gainsay this light
> I show them,—shall I too lack courage?—leave
> I, too, the post of me, like those I blame?
> Refuse, with kindred inconsistency,
> Grapple with danger whereby souls grow strong?
> I am near the end ; but still not at the end ;
> All till the very end is trial in life :
> At this stage is the trial of my soul,
> Danger to face, or danger to refuse?
> Shall I dare try the doubt now, or not dare?"

Still more striking is the old Pope's interpretation of the sense in which the "weak things of this world" shall "confound the mighty." Here we have one of the finest illustrations of the restless intellectual working of Mr. Browning's imagination in a purely spiritual region. It is the apparent *weakness*, he says, in the true faith, which appeals to the help and brings forth the love of man, till man finds at last that it was in its weakness that its strength consisted, in its imploring appeal to the heart that the marvellous power lay, which *could* not have lain hid in the fiat of almighty strength :—

> "What but the weakness in a faith supplies
> The incentive to humanity, no strength

> Absolute, irresistible, comports?
> How can man love but what he yearns to help?
> And that which men think weakness within strength,
> But angels know for strength and stronger yet—
> What were it else but the first things made new,
> But repetition of the miracle,
> The divine instance of self sacrifice
> That never ends and aye begins for man?"

Of a piece with this suggestion is the fine presage that the power of Christ can only be restored through an approaching age of doubt, which shall shake the towers of the Church till they tremble, and dissipate the formal and conventional monotony of orthodoxy,—

> "Till man stand out again, pale, resolute
> Prepared to die,—that is, alive at last.
> As we broke up that old faith of the world,
> Have we, next age, to break up this the new—
> Faith, in the thing, grown faith in the report—
> Whence need to bravely disbelieve report
> Through increased faith in thing reports belie?"

The picture of the courageous old man's slight hesitation in the discharge of his terrible duty,—of the deep questions as to the truths whereon he and his office rest, which that hesitation stirs,—of the plumbing of the most difficult problems of philosophy and faith, as his mind travels round the intellectual horizon of his lonely eminence,—of the gratitude with which he fixes his glance on Pompilia's spiritual loveliness as the one blossom "vouchsafed unworthy me, ten years a gardener of the untoward ground,"—of the anxious and doubtful admiration with which he notes Caponsacchi's impulsive noble-

ness,—and of the half-anxiety and half trust with which he observes the signs of moral decomposition—omens for those who are to come after him,—all is drawn so as to leave an indelible impression on the imagination. There is nothing in all Mr. Browning's works that will bear deliberate comparison with the four great figures of Guido, Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and Innocent.

Perhaps, however, the most characteristic, though not the greatest, of Mr. Browning's many poems on this class of semi-spiritual, semi-intellectual subjects is the 'Epistle containing the strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician;' which is an attempt to bring such medical science, or rather empirical skill, as might have existed in the time of Christ into direct contact with the "case" of the risen Lazarus, whom the Arab physician encounters in Bethany at the time when the siege of Jerusalem by Titus has just begun. Karshish, questioning himself and his friends as to the asserted resurrection, reports his opinion on it to his master in a letter vibrating helplessly between a guess that it was really a cure of unusually prolonged epilepsy which had left mania behind, and a proudly-resisted inclination to believe that there was something divine in the matter, as Lazarus himself asserted. The artist's skill, however, is shown, as usual, in delineating the influence of the two opposite sorts of thirst for knowledge in this dignified Arabian leech,—the pride of human science and craft, which makes him eager to penetrate the secret of a new and remarkable cure, and the yearning for divine know-

ledge, which thrills him with a humiliating sense of awe and hope at the very words he affects to despise from the ignorant peasant. The letter begins with stealthy Oriental subtlety—of course Browningite in form—far from his mark (for he is evidently bewildered and ashamed at the impression made upon him by the story of Lazarus), explaining, after compliments, a few new recipes; describing his temporary abode at Bethany, which lies, he says, from Jerusalem,

> "scarce the distance thence
> A man with plague-sores at the third degree
> Runs till he drops down dead:"

chronicling his new pathological experiences—"a viscid choler is observable in tertians," "scalp disease confounds me, crossing so with leprosy," and so forth; until at length he comes, with many apologies, on his "case of mania subinduced by epilepsy:"—

> "The man,—it is one Lazarus a Jew,
> Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
> The body's habit wholly laudable,
> As much indeed beyond the common health
> As he were made and put aside to show."

And then gradually the physician allows it to be seen how much thought he has spent on his diagnosis of the mania, how its very simplicity subdues and bewilders his wisdom. The effect, he says, on the mind of the patient is as if some new and vast world had been opened out to him, making this world worthless, which Lazarus is yet forbidden to leave. The patient has no measure of the true proportions of things; the armaments assembled

round Jerusalem are trivial to him, while he is lost in wonder that others do not see the value of the most trivial facts with his "opened eyes." "Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play, preposterously at cross purposes." Unbroken in cheerfulness if his child be ill or dying, a word or gesture on its part that he disapproves will startle him into an agony of fear. In short, the patient clings to "a narrow and dark thread of life, which runs across an orb of glory" into which he may not enter, though it gives its law to his spirit. His notions of right and wrong, instead of being adapted to the narrow conditions of this thread of life and its continuance, are always taking into account a whole universe of invisible and apparently imaginary facts:—

> "So is the man perplext with impulses
> Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
> Proclaiming what is Right and Wrong across
> And not along, this black thread through the blaze—
> 'It should be' balked by 'here it cannot be.'
> And oft the man's soul springs into his face,
> As if he saw again and heard again
> His sage that bade him rise, and he did rise!"

In this antique and patient enumeration of the mental symptoms of the patient, the most startling and impressive is reserved, with a sort of scientific shame, to the last, and only then oozes out involuntarily with the half apology, that, "in writing to a leech, 'tis well to keep back nothing of a case."

> "This man so cured regards the curer then
> As—God forgive me—who but God himself,

Creator and Sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
—'Sayeth that such an One was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was . . . . what I said nor choose repeat,
And must have so avouched himself in fact,
In hearing of this very Lazarus,
Who saith—but why all this of what he saith?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?
I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort
Aboundeth very nitrous. It is strange."

But the subject fascinates him, in spite of his scientific scorn for it. He goes back to relate the mode of his encounter with Lazarus; and finally there is wrung as it were from him, reluctant as he is to mention the mere ravings of a madman which have no pathological bearing on the case:—

"The very God! Think, Abib; dost thou think?
So the All-great were the All-loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice,
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in Myself.
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of Mine;
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love Me who have died for thee!'
The madman saith He said so: it is strange!"

Certainly no more original conception has been worked out in our time than this,—brief as the poem is,—and very powerfully is it sustained, the dignity and satisfied wisdom of the physician giving way at times beneath the glory of the poor Syrian's dream and the strange consis-

tency and simplicity of his demeanour,—but returning again with full elastic force wherever he can regain his complete assurance of the impossibility of the story, and the wholly unprofessional character of the explanation. It is only here and there that Mr. Browning has drawn worldly skill or wisdom, thus half-worshipping, with dazzled eyes, a simplicity above it. Generally in his poetry, as in the world, the prevalent type of sagacity freely makes use of an established faith, but is not willing to recognise it so far as it is new and disturbing. But this Oriental physician, who has evidently given up his life to study all diseases and remedies with open eyes, is one of the exceptions. When a light shines upon him, if he cannot gaze at it, it is his nature not to ignore it. Mr. Browning finds a deeper humility in science, with all its pride, than in the shifty talent of worldly knowledge.

To sum up in conclusion my conception of Mr. Browning's genius. He is not a great dramatist, but a great intellectual interpreter of the approaches to action. His most striking characteristic is the vigour of his intellectual and spiritual imagination, and of his carnal imagination (if I may be permitted a technical Scripture phrase to express the imagination of *all* the passions and perceptions), and the almost complete absence of the intermediate psychical or sentimental imagination, which is with most poets the principal spring of all their poetry, and perhaps the only spring of lyrical poetry. I do not know a poem of

Mr. Browning's which can be said to express a *mood*, as Shelley expresses so vividly moods of passionate yearning, Wordsworth of meditative rapture, Tennyson of infinite regret. Mr. Browning has no moods. His mind seems to leap at once from its centre to its surface without passing through the middle states which lie between the spirit and the senses. Hence we may see from another side why Mr. Browning's women are so imperfect, for their truest life is usually in this middle region, which seems totally absent from his poems. The nearest approach to a sentiment which he has drawn is, on the one side a passion, which he has drawn repeatedly and powerfully,—on the other a spiritual affection, "the devotion the heart lifts above and the heavens reject not," such as he has so finely painted in 'Caponsachi,' and 'Pompilia,' in 'Agnes,' and in that love of David for Jonathan, which comes flowing in in great waves, like a spring-tide, till it pours on into his love for God. This Mr. Browning has drawn as scarcely any other man could draw it. But these are essentially different from what is properly denoted by sentiment, which is apt to lean upon the occasional, lives on memory and association, tinges everything around it with a secondary glow of its own, and has neither the immediate carnal origin of a passion, nor that absolute independence both of circumstance and instinct, which characterises what I have called a spiritual affection. It is, as I have said, in sentiment that the tempering moods are rooted which give rise to so much of our highest poetry, and which touch with a sort of

illuminating magic so much which would otherwise have no intrinsic charm. Gray's 'Elegy,' for instance, is popular solely for the tender melancholy that hangs around it, and almost constitutes it an incarnation of evening regret. Now, of those sentiments which *tune* the imagination Mr. Browning's poems seem destitute, and the consequence is that he is apt to plunge us from cold spiritual or intellectual power into the fever of passion, and back again from this fever into the cold.

But I suspect that his interpreting intellect has *gained* through this hiatus in his imagination. Sentiment, *because* it is lyrical, because it tempts the mind into dwelling on its own moods, is a great hindrance to that strategic activity of the intellect which enables it to pass easily from one intellectual and moral centre to another. Mr. Browning is not a great dramatist, for in style he always remains himself, but he *is* a great intellectual interpreter of human character,—in other words, a great intellectual and spiritual ventriloquist; and nothing should, one would think, more interfere with the ease of spiritual ventriloquism than those clinging personal sentiments, which never leave the creative mind really free and solitary. For it must require a habit not merely of physical, but, if I may so speak, of spiritual solitude, to migrate rapidly in this way from your own actual centre in the world of intellect and feeling to a totally different centre, where you not only try to speak an alien language, but to think unaccustomed thought and feel unaccustomed passions; and yet to do this, as Mr. Browning

does, without really losing for a moment his own centre of critical life. Mr. Browning says very finely in one of his dramas,—

> "When is man strong until he feels alone?
> It was some lonely strength at first, be sure,
> Created organs such as those you seek
> By which to give its varied purpose shape,—
> And, naming the selected ministrants,
> Took sword and shield and sceptre—each a man!"

This seems to me to describe Mr. Browning's own work very powerfully. His intellectual and spiritual strength has apparently been much braced in this cold solitude. No poet of modern days gives us more distinctly the sense of an imagination which acts *proprio motu* than Mr. Browning. He is always masculine and vigorous. Original modern poetry is apt to be enervating, producing the effect of intellectual luxury; or if, like Wordsworth's, it is as cool and bright as morning dew, it carries us away from the world to mountain solitudes and transcendental dreams. Mr. Browning's—while it strings our intellect to the utmost, as all really intellectual poetry must, and has none of the luxuriance of fancy and wealth of sentiment which relaxes the fibre of the mind—keeps us still in a living world,—not generally the modern world, very seldom indeed the world of modern England, but still in contact with keen, quick, vigorous life, that, as well as engaging the imagination, really enlarges the range of one's intellectual and social, sometimes almost of one's political, experience. Mr. Browning cannot, indeed, paint action; but of the intel-

lectual approaches to action he is a great master. And in spite of more grating deficiencies in the medium of expression than any eminent English poet perhaps ever laboured under, these poems will slowly win for him,—and win most for him amongst those whose admiration is best worth having,—a great, a growing, and an enduring fame.

V.

THE POETRY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

MANY attempts have been from time to time made to give to the devotional poems of the Old Testament the rhythmical harmony of modern verse. But hardly with even the very best of these attempts, hardly with Milton's fine versions of some of the Psalms themselves, has there been much success; and in general readers of these versions fret at the unaccustomed monotony and the ever-recurring chimes, something as they would if the sea should begin to murmur sonatas, or the wind to whistle tunes. Nor is it simply that any change of form, impressed by a foreign cast of mind on poetry that has sunk deep into the heart of ages, is distressing and bewildering. Unless I am making the mistake with which modern philosophy so often reproaches modern thought,—of confounding the "second nature" of constant association with the original nature of inherent

constitution,—there is something in most of the Hebrew poetry which is essentially inconsistent with the framework of defined metre or rhyme. No doubt there are Hebrew lyrics which, had rhyme and fixed measure been then a recognised form of poetical expression, would have been naturally and effectively thrown into that form. Such one may recognise in David's lament over Saul and Jonathan; and again, in those many Psalms which approach more in cast and conception to the religious poetry of our own day,—that is, to an artistic presentation of the devotional feelings of man,—than to the sublimer type of the more characteristic Hebrew poetry, which seems generally to be busied with a direct delineation of God. But in most of the finer Psalms, and even more in the wonderful poetry of Isaiah and the minor prophets, there is something that defies the laws of regular metre or rhyme,—something that breaks through and rises up above them, when they are artificially imposed.

Not that I am of the number of those who regard these natural forms of poetry as arbitrary and ornamental restrictions, observed only in order to enhance the beauty of the essential thought; rather, to the true poet, are they fresh powers, new media of expression, enabling him to say much which otherwise must have remained for ever untold. Metrical beauty is the inborn music, as it were, which beats a natural accompaniment to the creative toil of the imagination, and vindicates the essential unity of the life which runs through it. As the con-

ception of the poet gradually gets itself translated into the language of mankind, the rhythm and harmony of the whole afford a real test of the depth and power of the creative genius, as distinguished from a faculty of mere mechanical construction. But though this is true of poetic efforts in general, it does not apply to the greater works of the Hebrew poets. Marvéllous as is the imaginative power which they display, yet, for the most part, they are not, in the strict sense, works of imagination,—works, that is, of which the purpose, unity, and proportions, are seized beforehand by the overseeing imagination, and worked out by it into their full development. On the contrary, they seem expressly to renounce all claim to imaginative unity, properly so called,—nay, to insist passionately on the fragmentary and isolated character of the glimpses which they gain into the Eternal secret,—to testify that the riddle of God's Providence is hidden from them, though the spirit of His life is revealed. And while this is the case, while the greatest imaginative beauties of the Hebrew poets have no living imaginative centre or unity of their own, but are used as scattered symbols of spiritual truths which pierce the natural and visible universe at isolated points, rather than harmonize and explain it, it seems almost a mockery to round them off with a rhythm and a rhyme which are the appropriate dress of finished creations. They are greater than other poems from the very same cause which renders them less complete. The plan of the universe was too great a plan to grasp, though here and there it

was given to the Hebrew poets to shed upon it a brilliant light. And the fragmentary character of their insight is fitly mirrored in the broken music of our prose versions.

When, indeed, the mind of the poet dwelt directly and exclusively on the spiritual perfection of God, the harmony of his theme ensured a certain imaginative unity in his work. But when, as was more common, it was his effort to afford some glimpse into the mystery of Providence, it was his very aim to maintain that what was visible to the imagination had no independent unity or significance in itself; he appealed for the solution of the human drama to the undeclared counsels of God and affirmed His faith in a heavenly music, inaudible as yet, lurking under the apparent discords of human destiny, but confessed his inability to explain what that music was. And in all such direct appeals from the visible to the invisible,—in all such confessions that the principle of harmony was still undiscovered, that the truth was shrouded in mystery,—the perfect rhythm, which seems to mark the natural march of a visible order and harmony, is far less suitable than the less measured speech in which all that is incipient or fragmentary in human life finds its natural medium of expression. Even Milton, with true poetic insight, as I think, into this principle, confined his versified renderings of the Psalms to those more strictly devotional outpourings in which the human heart is expressed, rather than those in which the "burden of the mystery" of Divine government is half relieved and half magnified. Is there not something

obviously and painfully incongrous, for instance, in any versification of such verses as these, which are deeply impressed with the characteristic genius of Hebrew poetry?—

"Whither shall I go then from thy spirit, or whither shall I go then from thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there: if I go down to hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, peradventure the darkness shall cover me, then shall my night be turned to day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee: but the night is clear as the day: the darkness and the light to thee are both alike."

To me, the broken harmony of the metre, the absence of rhyme,—in other words, the absence of any affectation of satisfied or adequate imaginative power,—is absolutely essential to portray the insupportable burden of the mystery weighing on the mind of the poet. And it is not so much the deficiency in the art of the following lines, but rather the attempt at art at all,—the very effort to run the thoughts of the Psalmist into smooth verse,—which repels me. I quote from a poetical version, made by Mr. Edgar Browning from the English Prayer-Book, of the Book of Psalms:—

"Where from thy spirit shall I go? where from thy presence hide?
Climb I to heaven, thour't there; or go to hell, thou'rt by my side.
If morning's wings I take, and dwell beside the farthest sea,
E'en there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand succour me.
If peradventure I should say, The darkness shall surround me,
Then shall my night be turned to day, and utterly confound me.
No darkness darkness is with thee: as clear as day is night;
For unto thee alike appear the darkness and the light."

I wonder the mere attempt to rhyme such thoughts as these did not at once convince any one who made the attempt, that there is no discord like that which fastens outward symbols of artistic unity on those heavings of elemental thought which are expressly confessed as utterly beyond the control of the thinker. To rhyme the thunders of Sinai would seem a scarcely less appropriate task; or, to make what is perhaps a fairer comparison, how would it be possible to translate Jacob's awe-struck exclamation, on awaking from the dream in which he had seen the ladder with angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth,—"How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven!"—into any more finished metrical form that would equally well express the inadequacy of the imagination to grasp the thoughts on which it brooded? Yet this one sentence might be taken as a perfect condensation of the attitude in which the imagination of the Hebrew poet was left when most deeply stirred by the breath of divine inspiration.

But I have no intention of dwelling further on the merits of any attempt to reduce to metre and rhyme our English translations of the Hebrew poets. The often repeated effort to exhibit some of them in a form adapted to certain exigencies of the popular taste, may afford sufficient excuse for these comments on their intrinsic genius and literary character. It is a strange thing that, among all the various criticisms of modern times, there should have been so little effort to appreciate the special

relation of the Hebrew poetry to the poetry of other nations and other ages. However true it may be that by far the highest value of the writings of the Hebrew poets is not literary, but spiritual and moral,—that they are generally read, and generally rightly read, for purposes from which any literary estimate of their qualities and worth is far removed,—still, to the student of national literatures, no phenomena can be either more remarkable or more instructive than those of a literature produced in a moral climate so widely separated from that of all other nations as the Hebrew. The more profoundly we accept the spiritual inspiration of the Hebrew poets,—only rejecting, of course, the absurd doctrine of absolute verbal dictation, by the Divine Spirit, through the mechanical instrumentality of certain chosen men, which obviously degrades them from poets into amanuenses at once,—the more remarkable these phenomena must be; for the more completely new will the conditions be under which the human imagination acts; and the more instructive will be the contrast between literatures which, like the Greek or the Teutonic, seem the indigenous development of human conditions of imagination, acting without any consciousness, at least, of supernatural constraint, and that which is educed, from first to last, out of the creative germs of a divine inspiration. What are the distinctive features of such a literature? What are the characteristics which it has in common with all other literatures?

Perhaps we shall get the distinctest conception of the

characteristic aspects of the Hebrew imagination, if we look first at what may be called its least unique, its least individual efforts,—those exquisite pastoral and national traditions in which the imagination can certainly not be said to have been properly *creative* at all, but only formative and selective; evincing its special characteristics rather by the details on which it fixes and the prominence it gives to special features in the tradition, than by any productive power of its own. In such pastoral traditions as the book of Genesis records, or in the later but equally simple and lovely story of the book of Ruth, there is more of that common beauty and simplicity which belongs to the early records of all great nations,—more which in its rural pictures and quiet naturalism reminds us at times of the Odyssey or the Scandinavian poems,—more of that "freshness of the early world" which belongs to the childhood of humanity itself, and therefore contains fewer characteristically Hebrew features,—than in any other part of the Bible literature.

Few can read the account of Abraham's servant waiting beside his kneeling camels at the well outside the city of Nahor till the hour of sunset, when the women came out to draw; of his first meeting with Rebekah, her kindly help in drawing for him and his camels, and her joyful return into the city with the news of the discovered relationship to his master, and the gold bracelets and earrings with which he had loaded her,—without being, in some measure reminded of the

beautiful narrative in the Odyssey, of the Princess Nausikaa and her maidens going out for the day to wash the clothes of the household in the little river of the island, and disturbing, by their lamentations over the loss of their ball, the sleeping Ulysses. In both cases alike, a higher agency is made the thread of the story. The servant of Abraham is seeking a wife for his young master from among his own people, and God has "sent his angel before him," to choose for Isaac a wife more suitable than Canaan could have produced. Nausikaa, again, is represented as acting under the impulse of Athene, whose care for Ulysses prepares for him this fortunate meeting with the princess. In both cases, therefore, the naturalness of the life delineated is in a certain way bound up with the national religion,—or, as we must call it in the case of Greece, mythology; and the contrast between them is a fair illustration of the contrast between the national imagination of the two races. A light fancy plays round all the delineations of the one; a serious satisfaction in thus tracing out the ways of the ancestral Providence animates and condenses every description in the other. It is not that that the actors are at all less human, less strictly natural; the golden bracelets are at least as much prized by Rebekah and her friends, as are the "delicate garments" which haunt Nausikaa's dreams, and which it is her greatest delight to wash. But the one tale is largely embellished, if not entirely created, by a graceful fancy; the other is a cherished link in the national life. The

one is full of simile and by-play, and evidently sets as much store by the discursive illustrations as by the story itself,—which, indeed, we cannot but feel, is little more than a framework invented for the sake of the pictures it contains; the other runs directly and eagerly on to its conclusion. The crowd of Phæacian maidens striving gaily with each other while stamping out the clothes in the water-troughs, and afterwards dancing and singing and throwing the ball on the banks of the stream, are not more widely different, as a picture, from the grave Rebekah with the pitcher on her shoulder coming from the city to draw, than is the treatment of the theme in the Greek poem from that in the Hebrew narrative.

"She went, but followed by her virgin train,
At the delightful rivulet arrived,
Where those perennial cisterns were prepared,
With purest crystal of the fountain fed
Profuse, sufficient for the deepest stains:
Loosing the mules, they drove them forth to browse
On the sweet herb beside the dimpled flood.
The carriage next lightning, they bore in hand
The garments down to the unsullied wave,
And thrust them heap'd into the pools, their task
Despatching brisk, and with an emulous haste.
When they had all purified, and no spot
Could now be seen or blemish more, they spread
The raiment orderly along the beach
Where dashing tides had cleansed the pebbles most,
And laving, next, and smoothing o'er with oil
Their limbs, all seated on the river's bank,
They took repast, leaving the garments stretched
In noon-day fervour of the sun to dry.
Their hunger satisfied, at once arose
The mistress and her train, and putting off

Their head attire, played wanton with the ball,
The princess singing to her maids the while.
Such as shaft-armed Diana roams the hills,
Taÿgetus sky-capt or Erymanth,
The wild-boar chasing, or fleet-footed hind,
All joy; the rural nymphs, daughters of Jove,
Sport with her, and Latona's heart exults:
She high her graceful head above the rest,
And features lifts divine, though all be fair,
With case distinguishable from them all:
So all her train she, virgin purè, surpassed.
* * * * * * *
The princess then, casting the ball toward
A maiden of her train, erroneous threw,
And plunged it deep into the dimpling stream.
All shrieked; Ulysses at the sound awoke,
And sitting, meditated thus the cause:
Ah me! what mortal race inhabit here?
Rude are they, contumacious, and unjust?
Or hospitable and who fear the Gods?" &c.[1]

Compare with this the interview between Abraham's steward and Rebekah.

"And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not. And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold. And said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee, is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said to him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. She said moreover unto him,

[1] Cowper's translation of the Odyssey.

We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in. And the man bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren. And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things. And Rebekah had a brother, whose name was Laban: and Laban ran unto the man unto the well. And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me, that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels."

Now, of course, one does not expect in what professes to be true narrative anything like the same play of fancy, the same plentiful growth of subsidiary life, as we may well look for in the confessedly legendary poems of Greece. But the remarkable point, as regards the Hebrew imagination, is exactly this,—that, being so powerful and vivid as we know it to have been, it nevertheless clings so closely to past reality, to ancestral traditions, and never seems to have exercised itself in creating or developing, from existing germs, imaginative traditions such as abound in the Greek and Teutonic literature. With numberless rude fragments of heroic story ready to its purpose, such as we find scattered through the Book of Judges, for example, there seems to have been no tendency in the Hebrew imagination to give that life, and form, and development to them, which the popular imagination of an imaginative people is generally so ready to impart. There is no literature

with so many abandoned fragments of story as the Hebrew. Where the true history lives, it lives with marvellous vividness in the people's imagination; to that the national mind evidently clings with intense tenacity; but where the history becomes discontinuous, where there is only the "shadow of a great name," the imaginative power does not seem to step into its place. It is not with the Hebrew people a productive, but, as regards human story, only a representative power; it does not multiply, but only preserves, the hints of the past; it is, in its human sphere at all events, not a discursive and prolific capacity, but merely a faculty of glowing and tenacious vision or retrospect.

Perhaps, natural as it is, it may be a mistake warranted by a very partial experience, to connect as we do great imaginative power with fertility and luxuriance of conception. Any national or any individual mind that can summon imaginary, and even real past, scenes and actions so vividly before it as to live, as it were, in their presence and under their influence, must be said to live, in the highest sense, an imaginative life. There is in such a mind a faculty of spiritual vision which rivals the power of the senses. But there need not be necessarily any *fertility* of imagination, any power of reproducing in new and varied shapes the impressions gathered from the invisible forms of life on which it feeds. "If," said Coleridge, in distinguishing between fancy and imagination, "the check of the reason and senses were withdrawn, fancy would become *delirium*, and imagination

mania." The Hebrew imagination was of this latter type. It was the pervading presence of one or two great —sometimes perverted—spiritual impressions, or convictions, which gave unity to Hebrew traditions, and the characteristic intensity to their thought and language. The haunting power of two great convictions, National Unity and Supernatural Guidance, supplies at once the main connecting threads of Jewish tradition. But an imagination thus haunted could not well be fertile or original in its dealings with human story; for national pride is conservative, not inventive; and the mind which feeds eagerly on the evidences of an actual Providence, will not care to live in a world of its own creation.

These two great convictions, of national unity and supernatural guidance, are, then, I believe, the two principal centres of Jewish imagination, which at once precluded its being creative like the Greek, and also governed the selection and arrangement of even its simplest and most strictly human traditions. All of them have one thread connecting them with the growth and glory of the national life, and another parallel thread illustrating the wonderful Providence of supernatural government. For example, there is no tradition in the Hebrew literature which is at first sight less closely interwoven with either of these threads, more purely composed of universal human elements, than the story of Ruth. Hartley Coleridge, in verses commenting on the mysterious "tale of bloodshed" which constitutes the

history of Israel, has called this story an oasis of human beauty in "the wild and waste of Bible truth." Yet the cause of its preservation and consecration among the chronicles of the nation is scarcely the loveliness of the rural picture of the young gleaner in the harvest-fields of Bethlehem followed by the kindly eye of the rich farmer bidding his young men drop ears on purpose for her from the sheaves; nor even the mere devotedness of heart which made Ruth "cleave" to Naomi. It is, on the one side, the exultation in the providential reward which was allotted to an alien woman of Moab for her abandonment of her country and gods in order to embrace the faith, and identify herself with the fortunes, of Israel; on the other side, the fact, that David, the great king of Israel, was descended so directly from her,—which made this beautiful narrative so precious to the Jews. And Naomi said, "Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back *unto her people and unto her gods;* return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge,—thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." And again, "Boaz answered and said unto her, it hath fully been shown me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband, and how thou hast left thy father, and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a

full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." And, then, the narrative ends, and as it were justifies itself, by tracing the descent of David from the marriage of Boaz and Ruth.

In fact, incidentally beautiful and tender as many of the early traditions of Israel are, the imagination of the Jews dwelt chiefly, if not entirely, on the illustrations they contain of the two great spiritual realities on which their hearts were fixed,—the divine unity of their nation, and the supernatural Providence which watched over its children individually, and its collective destinies. In saying this, of course, I do not pretend that this accounts for the imaginative beauty and power with which these traditions are told; I merely indicate the kindling convictions which stirred the thoughts of the writers who first embodied them in their present shape. The visionary eye and ear must, of course, have been theirs, or no intensity of spiritual convictions could have enabled them by a few simple touches to delineate scenes that must live as long as the human race. But this visionary faculty would be entirely quiescent, were not some kindling faith or conception to excite its activity. The vividness of the outward picture must depend on the manner of the painter; and if "the eyes of them that see" are not to "be dim, and the ears of them that hear" are to "hearken," the visions and sounds which pass before them must be connected and engraved upon the seer by some inward trust or love. The spiritual

roots, so to say, of the Hebrew traditionary poems are the faith in the glorious destiny of the nation, and the overseeing Providence of God as the power which had wrought out that destiny and should further work it out to its conclusion.

But if it is easy to trace the main streams of popular tradition to those two closely allied and indeed ultimately identical sources,—the pride of national unity and greatness, and the delight in tracing the movements of that guiding hand which had shaped the discipline of the nation in shaping the lot of its fathers and its kings, —it is yet easier to trace the same overruling thoughts in those "occasional" poems, as one may call them, which are still preserved among its records. Of course, where the occasions are directly political, as in the case of the lament of David over the death of Saul and Jonathan, or the vindictive pæan of Deborah over the fate of Sisera, we should fully expect to find these thoughts most conspicuous; and yet, in both cases, very few readers are at all aware how entirely these thoughts give their whole unity and colouring to the poems. In the one case, the beauty of the personal lament which David pours forth for Jonathan, and in the other, the intensity of the personal exultation with which Deborah depicts the murder of Sisera,—have distracted our thoughts from the real imaginative roots of the poems. Certainly, the true spirit of David's lamentation is not caught, if the expression of love for his friend with which it closes is regarded as the essential thought of the poem. Strong

as that feeling is, it is clearly subordinated to a grander and a stronger feeling, and one which ruled more completely in the future king of Israel's heart than any individual affection. The defeat and death of Saul had been announced to him by an Amalekite, who expected the injured and exiled chief to receive it as good news, and even to reward him for the part he had taken as an accessory to the slaughter of the defeated king. Saul, says the messenger, in his despondency at his overthrow, had implored him, as he passed by, to put an end to his life; and he had complied. The horror that David feels for this profane spilling of the blood of the anointed king of Israel, which he thinks must drop a curse on the very mountains of Gilboa, where it happened,—his dread lest even the Philistines should hear and rejoice at that which the messenger had cruelly supposed might be welcome tidings to himself,—is the key-note of the lament.

"And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed: and David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son. The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither rain upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of

Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights; who put on ornaments of gold on your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thy high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

Personal grief is only an episode in the lament, though constituting its greatest beauty; the representative character of the king and his son as the chiefs of Israel, appointed by God, is the prominent thought; and the ignominy of the shield cast away before the enemy constitutes the burden of the song.

Again, in the greatest war-song of any age or nation,—the exultation of Deborah over Sisera's complete defeat, and subsequent assassination by the hand of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite,—no doubt personal revenge might seem to blaze high above Deborah's faith in her nation and her God, as the kindling or exciting spiritual principle which brings the scene in such marvellous vividness before her eyes. But though this feeling may add perhaps some of the fire to the latter part of the poem, it is clear that her faith in the national unity, and God, as the source of the national unity, was the great, binding thought of the whole. The song dwells, first, with the most intense bitterness on the decay of patriotism in the tribes that did not combine against the common foe: "For the divisions of Reuben," she says, "there were great searchings of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the

flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan, and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the seashore, and abode in his breaches;" with which she contrasts the nobler conduct of Zabulon and Naphtali, who "jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field." Their kings came and fought, she says, and "took no gain of money;" and all powers of heaven and earth were on their side. "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera; the river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength." And the transition by which she passes to her fierce exultation over Sisera's terrible fate shows distinctly what was the main thought in her mind. "There was peace," we are told, between the king of Hazor, whose forces Sisera commanded, and Heber the Kenite; the latter was only distantly akin to the people of Israel; the help of his tribe was not expected; and yet, though the aid of many true Israelites was wanting, from *his* house came the blow, treacherous though it was, which rid the nation of the dreaded and hated enemy.

"Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord; curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked for water, and she gave him milk: she brought forth butter in a lordly dish; she put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer

she smote Sisera, she smote off his head when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead. The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love thee be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

The exultation with which the poet dwells on the treachery of the act, on the helpless prostration of the great captain's corpse before a mere woman's knees; the terrible minuteness with which she gloats over the raised expectations of the mother of the murdered soldier; the picture of the "wise ladies" in attendance suggesting triumphant reasons for the delay, and of the anxious eagerness with which she even suggested these reasons to herself,—no doubt indicate fierce personal as well as fierce patriotic triumph. But the whole tenor of this grand poem and the conclusion, "So let all thy enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love thee be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might," at all events prove that the personal hatred was so closely bound up with the representative feelings of the writer as a judge of Israel, and with her trust in the Lord of Hosts, that the latter lent a kind of halo to the unscrupulous ferocity of the former.

The two historical songs I have noticed celebrate

exciting political events. But nothing is more striking than the tendency of all lyrical poetry, among the Hebrews, to connect itself with the same haunting conceptions of the national unity and the national Providence. The great number of beautiful poems which directly or indirectly are connected with the Babylonian captivity are all of this class. Instead of containing, as might be expected, a mere pathetic record of individual privations and sorrows, they all of them seem to speak in the name of the nation; and to address God, not as the healer of individual affliction, but as holding in His hand the destiny of the nation, whose common suffering or common joy was inseparable from that of the individual heart. Such is the beautiful psalm written "by the waters of Babylon," which ends with curses on the oppressors almost as fierce as those of Deborah's song. Such, too, is the still more beautiful poem in which the restoration of Israel to their own land is solemnised, and the captivity treated as a source of spiritual blessing, rather than a curse. Even the heathens, it tells us, confessed that the Lord had "done great things for them," and so it was; for, as the winter torrent returns again to its dry bed when the parching summer is past, —as the seed sown in grief returns in joy in the yellow sheaves of harvest,—so, by one of those rapid and unreal changes of fate which make even the waking ask if they dream, the Israelites found themselves returning to their land; once more a nation, and once again assured of the unchangeable purposes of their God.

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Sion: then were we like unto them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter: and our tongue with joy. Then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for them. Yea, the Lord hath done great things for us already: whereof we rejoice. Turn our captivity, O Lord: as the rivers in the south. They that sow in tears: shall reap in joy. He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him."

It is, then, I believe, a matter of fact that the imagination of the Hebrew poets is never thoroughly stirred by mere individual emotion. Nothing is more striking than the tendency of their individual and solitary moods of thought to widen, as the fire kindles, into meditations on the national history and the mysteries of its supernatural providence. Often the turn is so sudden and abrupt, that, to our modern ears, in which history and poetry sound as incompatible terms, the transition seems harsh and grotesque. The poet who is sinking under the burden of disease and sorrow, and is pouring forth what seems a weight of strictly private trouble into the ear of God, has no sooner confessed that it is "his own infirmity," and not the neglect of the Most High, which makes his weariness seem so intolerable, than he plunges into the "wonders of old," and ends his hymn with what to modern ears sounds like a strange anti-climax: "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. *Thou leddest thy people like sheep, by the hands of Moses and Aaron.*" Of lyrics proper, no doubt, there are many in the Book of Psalms; but usually the clear vision of God summons up by a

kind of necessity the image of the nation, and the story of the nation's fates.

Sometimes one understands better the characteristic moving power of a great literature by contrasting it with that of a different people or age, than by contemplating it as it is in itself. It would be untrue to say that the Hebrew literature is wholly devoid of any feeling of art; for it must be confessed, that when a great faith has to be expressed, or a great problem stated, there is that powerful instinct for comparison and contrast which is almost inseparable from a vivid and, so to say, haunted imagination. Art is, after all, only a second nature; and want of artistic power is not felt until the first glow of poetic fire begins to fade. But certainly there is in the Hebrew literature about as little conscious art as in any literature in the world. Let us look at it, for instance, in its pictorial aspect. Considering the graphic power with which it abounds, how utterly destitute is it of artistic painting,—of colouring or drawing, that is put in for the sake of the picture itself, rather than for any purpose which the picture is to answer! I may best illustrate what I mean by a contrast between one of the poetical fragments of Jewish history, and the modern rendering of it by Sir Walter Scott. The kindling or germinal thought which induced that great artist to versify the fragment to which I allude, was the sense of mere external picturesqueness; while the purpose which was stirring in the heart of the Hebrew writer was the desire I have so often spoken of, to record the

glory of the national life, and the might of the outstretched arm of Jehovah, which made it what it was. Writing of the guidance of the people of Israel through the desert, the author of the Book of Exodus says: "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people" (xiii. 21, 22),—which Sir Walter Scott renders into this well-known verse:—

> "When Israel, of the Lord beloved,
> Out of the land of bondage came,
> Her fathers' God before her moved,
> An awful Guide, in smoke and flame.
> By day, along the astonished lands,
> The cloudy pillar glided slow;
> By night, Arabia's crimsoned sands
> Returned the fiery column's glow."

The occupation of mind betrayed with the picture of the desert scenery; the external effects of the pillar of cloud and of fire; the astonishment with which the solemn procession would be regarded by the Arabian tribes; the relief of the dark object amid the noonday desert-glare; the bright patch of sand moving through the midnight;—are all given in a manner utterly foreign to that of the Hebrew poet. The modern artist is delighting in the scenic effect; the ancient chronicler was wholly occupied with the overshadowing power of God.

The poet, as we understand him in modern days, is

perhaps only too exclusively a student of beauty; and much that he delineates he delineates without any further reason than that it has shaped itself vividly in his imagination, and seems to demand from him an expression in words. There is not a vestige of such poetry in the Old Testament, unless, indeed, one may except Solomon's Song. I have traced already the thread of significance which has given a place in the Bible to those traditions which modern readers so often value chiefly for the pictures of Rebekah "by the palm-shaded well," or Ruth gleaning among the yellow corn. But when we study what we may call the casual pictures in the Bible, —the wealth of poetic material strewn among its pages, which is used only by the Hebrew poets in incidental illustration and allusion, this complete absence of the artistic value for beauty and sublimity *as such*, becomes extremely striking.

Modern poets are never tired of dwelling directly on the beauty of nature. The "sunshine," they tell us, "is a glorious birth." They never weary "of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower." And the Hebrew poet perceived these things too, but how did he use them? "The God of Israel," sings David, "said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds;—as the tender grass springing out of the earth in the clear shining after rain." We should not know that Isaiah had ever lingered on the beach of

Palestine, watching the Mediterranean as it cast up sea-weed and the soil of many a neighbouring island under the lash of the west wind, but for the passing image: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." We should never guess that he had watched the Tyrian sailors trying to shake out canvas under a light wind, with a crippled ship to manage, but for the metaphorical denunciation against the enemies of the Lord: "Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast; they could not spread their sail." How totally different from the spirit of the modern poet!—

> "As some grave Tyrian trader from the sea
> Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
> Lifting the cool-haired creepers stealthily,
> The fringes of a southward-facing brow,
> Among the Ægean isles;
> And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
> Freighted with amber grapes and Chian wine,
> Green bursting figs and tunnies steeped in brine,
> And knew the intruders on his ancient home,—
> The young lighthearted master of the waves;—
> And snatched his rudder, and shook out more sail,
> And day and night held on indignantly
> O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,"[2] &c.

In every line here the poet lingers with satisfied eye on some fresh beauty; while, however grand the scene before the mind of the Hebrew poet, it is to the meaning behind it that he is hurrying on. Thus the Psalmist had

[2] Poems by Matthew Arnold.

certainly gazed with awe on the grandeur of the sudden "white squalls" of the Mediterranean; and yet, but for the passing allusion to God's power,—"He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves thereof; they mount up to the heavens; they go down to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble; they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet. So he bringeth them to the desired haven,"—he would never have embodied what he had seen in a poem. Any modern poet would have delighted to dwell upon the scene: the pale line of foam scudding nearer and nearer before the blast; the blue sea suddenly turning black beneath the cloud, and then lashed into whiteness by the squall: the cries of the sailors; the quivering of the ship as the tempest strikes her;—in short, he would have made a picture of it, and then, touching on the despair of the passengers, would gradually have led up to the pity and power of God. But to the Hebrew poet the thing is not interesting in itself, as a picture, at all; it is a passing symbol of Almighty goodness and discipline; he uses it only to express his intense sense of the omnipresence of providential power.

So, too, with the common imagery of modern Christian poetry—mountains, fields, trees. That the Hebrew poets felt the stateliness of the cedar: knew, too, when "the

power of hills" was on them, were alive to the grateful shelter of the "leafy spring,"—no one who reads their pages can doubt. "The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted:" "He watereth the hills from his chambers—the earth is satisfied with the fruit of his works." "In the Lord put I my trust, how say ye to my soul, flee as a bird to your mountain? For lo, the wicked bend their bow," &c. And yet we never find a single express delineation of the plains of Hebron, or the snows of Lebanon, of sunset in the Mediterranean as the prophets must have seen it go down from Mount Carmel, of the valley of the Jordan, or of the desolate solitudes of the Dead Sea,—in all their writings. These things are alluded to, but only and purely to express their higher thoughts of God—as a kind of pictorial language of trust, prophecy, or prayer—never from the sense of their individual beauty. "*He* maketh grass to grow upon the mountains." "Fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy winds," are mentioned; but only "as fulfilling *his* word." These things are not beautiful for their own sakes, but glorious only as the instruments of His will. "Hear ye mountains," says the prophet Micah, "the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth;" and even there, alone with the hills and the sky, he pours forth no wonder at the glory of nature, but while uttering indignation at the sins of men, uses nature only allusively, as the instrument to shadow forth his thought. So also, to the shepherd Amos, the mountain winds and the midnight star are

no study in themselves, but a fleeting glimpse of the Eternal power: "Lo, he that formed the mountains and createth the wind and declareth to man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth—the Lord, the God of Hosts, is his name." "Ye who turn judgments to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth; seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of Death into the morning, and maketh the day dark unto night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the earth. The Lord of Hosts is his name." It is not easy to conceive a sublimer characteristic of the Hebrew poetry than this, that it treats all creation as a mere shadow; and finds the essence of its beauty, as well as the sustaining power of its life, in the spiritual world.

And it is this total absence from the Hebrew literature of any trace of human Art,—its complete want of appreciation for the subordinate perfections of inferior natures and groups of life, each "after its kind"—its constant effort to refer all things to the divine will and thought as the true centre and root of all things,—its indisposition to enter with any depth or breadth of interest into the inner life of any inferior nature, except so far as that inner life points some visible divine end,—in a word, its preference for studying the universal beauty of life only in God's will, instead of studying God's will in the universal beauty,—which makes the Hebrew poetry so

distinct in kind from the larger portion of the poetry of other literatures. It resolves the visible world into a hieroglyphic of the spiritual world; and even regards all these regions of naturalistic life rather impatiently, as a veil, where they do not seem to aid directly in the work of revelation. Purpose, significance, beauty, natural harmony, in the visible creation, if they do not bear directly on the moral and spiritual relations with God, are consigned indiscriminately to the general realm of His mysterious acts of power; and are valued only as illustrating the scale, grandeur, and infinite multiplicity of His energies. "The young lions roar after their prey, they seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour till the evening. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. . . . These all wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season; that thou givest them they gather. Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good; thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust." How different this from the imaginative care with which Homer, for instance, dwells on the characteristic nature and individual habits of the lion—

> "So forth he went, as goes the lion forth,
> Whom winds have vexed, and rains; fire fills his eyes,
> And whether herds of flocks or woodland deer

He finds, he rends them, and adust for blood,
Abstains not even from the guarded fold."[3]

What is not seen to be essential to the moral and spiritual beauty and constitution of the universe, enters into the Hebrew poet's thought only as illustrating the unsearchable riches of God ; and has no intrinsic interest and no fascination for the imagination apart from this view of it.

Now this, I need hardly say, puts a great gulf between the Hebrew and ordinary literatures. Man is usually interested in all varieties of human and finite beauty or life, without special or exclusive reference, at all events, to their divine purpose. He may recognise the necessary degradation which all natural beauty undergoes when the divine light no longer shines upon it ; but still, usually the first poetic instinct is indicated by a capacity for entering into the heart of *natural* life,—it may be the mental and moral varieties of human nature, or it may be the simple life of the flower or the stream, and rising, if he should so rise, through this vividness of sympathy with Nature to the spiritual meanings or symbols it may suggest. He sees the daffodils fluttering and dancing in the breeze beside the lake, and says,

"The waves beside them danced, but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee ;
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company ;"

[3] Odyssey, vi. 130, Cowper's translation.

and it is not till he has, as it were, reached the very essence of the natural loveliness before him, that he dilates on the unsuspected stores of joy they have brought to "that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude." But this is quite alien to the habit of the old Hebrew poet; he saw the divine light shining *on* the world of nature and man, but scarcely shining *through* the world of nature and man, except in the direction of man's moral and spiritual life. He took no pleasure in rising *through* the purely natural to the supernatural; he looked with awe on God's works, because he knew, and entered into, and worshipped God's spirit; but he did not care to explore the non-spiritual aspects of the wisdom of God, through a life of patient and quiet sympathy with the natural beauties of His works.

Hence the modes of thought most natural to a modern poet,—such modes of thought as gave Shakespeare his genial insight into the varieties of human passion and action, or Wordsworth and Tennyson their insight into those spiritual aspects of Nature which only study and meditative sympathy discloses,—were, in general, quite foreign to the poets of Israel. As the Jewish thinkers had little share in forwarding that growth of science and the arts which were due, in Greece, to a minute intellectual study of the laws of physical creation, —so Jewish poets had little share in forwarding that growth of epic and dramatic literature, which also arose in Greece, and was due to the growing insight into the ways of man, and the affinities between man and

the natural world around him. So far, indeed, as the *spiritual* nature of man was concerned, the Hebrew poetry contains a delineation full of sympathetic insight. All the highest resources of the poet are exhausted in describing the thirst for God of which the soul of man is conscious. The "hart panting after the water-brooks," —the "dry and thirsty land where no water is,"—the tempest-driven bird seeking refuge from the storm,—do but serve to remind one of the many tender and characteristic poems of this class in which the Hebrew literature abounds.

But go beyond the *spiritual* nature of man, and the sympathy of the Hebrew poets is dried up at once. Even into the varieties of moral temperament no insight is shown. The line is drawn between the wicked and the good; and in all the contemplative poetry of the Bible no interest is betrayed in the inward varieties of impulse, motive, and affection, which distinguish the innumerable *kinds* of human excellence or frailty from each other. Pride and humility, insincerity and uprightness, avarice and generosity, are condemned and praised, without one trace of meditative or instinctive intelligence of the constitutional frailties and gifts which vary so infinitely the degrees of guilt or virtue attaching to them in different men and different circumstances; the absolute divine standard is clearly displayed, the relative human conditions are left entirely out of view. The poet who can delineate with so inspired a pen the divine "beauty of holiness," has little or no interest in

the wonderfully varied forms of human conflict through which that beauty must be pursued. His central sympathy is with the divine life of God,—his compassion is equal and impartial for all the shortcomings of human unworthiness; *kinds* he does not distinguish; it is not into the individual heart that he has taught himself to enter; the natural history of human character it is not for him to write, for his is the greater task of delineating for us the character which "is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

One of the finest, and perhaps the earliest, of all the poems in the Hebrew literature,—that in which the Divine origin of Creation is revealed to man under an imaginative form of erroneous physical history, often foolishly regarded as invalidating the spiritual authority of the whole,—not only gives us the true key to the problem of the Universe, but points out, at the same time, the characteristic aspects under which alone the Jewish poets and prophets were likely to regard the life of nature and humanity. The purpose and order of the lower universe, we are told, is man; to the use of man all the lower forms of life are made subject; but man, again, finds all his meaning and life in God; and all nature, therefore,—human nature included,—is to look for its significance to the word of God. From Him all our life receives its order and its meaning; it is the orderly succession of his Creative work which is to be held as the ground of the like orderly succession in our tasks and duties; it was because there was in His mind

a spring of eternal rest, as well as of creative energy, that we are enjoined to respect the law of rest as well as the law of labour. In God is to be found the explanation of man's being; in man's being the explanation of every descending stage of creation. I have paraphrased, in very awkward language, the sublime words to which I refer; but this was necessary, in order to draw attention to the point I wish to illustrate. The stately succession of created things springing into being beneath the living breath of God; the evenings, which see each fresh work accomplished, the mornings, which see the next begun; the orderly separation of earth and sky, of sea and land; the growth of grass and trees; the first circles of the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens; the new-born seasons; the creation of living creatures; the birth of man in God's image; the gift of the supremacy into his hands; and the divine sentence upon each new "kind" as it arises, and finally upon the whole, that it is good,—are all so familiar to us, that we are apt to overlook the characteristic thought contained that each lower nature refers upward to the next above it, and the highest created nature to God: the light to the heavens, the heavens to the sun, moon, and stars; these to the earth; the earth to the vegetable world; this, again, to the animal world above it; this to man, who rules over it, and man to God. At what link can you stop in such a chain? What nature can you study, without seeking the key to it in that next superior? And if so, how shall it be possible to stop at the natural at all, or

imagine that we can study fitly any order that is not supernatural and eternal? Earthly and human beauty can only be relative, after all, and do not deserve a moment's attention, unless they symbolise a beauty that is absolute, perfect, and self-sustained.

This revelation of the natural law of subordination of things and creatures is actually and not merely poetically true; and yet it naturally leads, of course, to an effort which could only be partially successful—to study the secrets of the Universe in God, in whose image man is made, and to suppose every thing absolutely hidden from us on which this direct communion with God throws no light. So far as spiritual life is concerned, this is the true order of study. God reveals His spirit to us directly; and without it nothing spiritual is intelligible at all. And the method of the Hebrew poetry, therefore, presents thus far not only the Divine truth, but the only true approach to the spiritual secrets of human life. But on other sides of our life this is not so. Though spiritual truth is known first through the knowledge of God; and though, without knowing Him, all other truth is misseen and misconstrued,—yet, this key once gained, the range of its comprehension is indefinitely extended by studying God in nature and humanity, instead of contemplating nature and humanity only in God. And as the life of the universe was regarded by the prophets of Israel only on this latter side, there was necessarily a large field which their imagination never visited and represented. The various works of creation were pro-

nounced separately good, "each after its kind;" but what those "kinds" were in themselves, it was left to Gentile nations and other ages to study and describe. To the writer in the Book of Genesis, the life of each kind was merged in that of the kind above it; all the lower world in man, and man in God. And the national poets uniformly pursued this line of thought: all that was purely human, and all which was below the human type, was used only as *symbolic* of something higher, if not wholly passed by as existing exclusively for the sake of that which was above it.

And hence all the poetry of the Old Testament is true and divine at the expense of variousness of insight and breadth of sympathy. It is what one might call a heliocentric, as distinguished from a geocentric, representation of life. The former gives the true and absolute standard; but for that very reason cannot enter into the natural history of human errors and human individuality. If you would study the life of earth, you must leave your central position in the sun. The strange habits and ways of man cannot be mastered by communion only with the spirit of God, though they cannot be understood at all without it. But the prophets, who were also the poets of Israel, were sent to announce and reveal the Light, not to study the winding avenues by which alone it could penetrate the human heart.

Hence one does not see in their strains the uplifted eye of the suppliant half so vividly as the searching glance of the Eternal. Fascinated by the supernatural

gaze of the Almighty, the prophet often so identifies himself with God that he forgets his own person, and speaks in the very name of Jehovah. The Psalmists, for example, are always vacillating between the first person and the third when they deliver the purposes of God. As they warm with their spiritual inspiration, they lose themselves in the person of him who inspires them, and then are again recalled to themselves. And the prophets habitually fall into the same changing mode of address. "Behold," says Isaiah, "*I* have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling." "I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." The prophet, as he writes, is no longer the child of Israel,—the holder himself of a cup of trembling,—a wayworn son of earth: he sees the high places of the earth far beneath his feet; he sees the cup of trembling held to the lips of others—he himself is sweeping the universe with the infinite gaze of God.

This sublime characteristic of the Hebrew prophets, that they seem almost to forget their human centre of life in their effort to delineate divine truth, is strikingly illustrated in the frequent surrender of their private lives and affections, for the purpose of sculpturing, in a living symbol, on the mind of the nation, the lesson that no mere words could have taught. How far can any human being now, even distantly, comprehend the state of mind in which Ezekiel must have lived when he acted thus under the Divine inspiration?

"Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded. And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us that thou doest so? Then I answered them, The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword. And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another. Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord God. Also, thou son of man, shall it not be in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds, their sons and their daughters, That he that escapeth in that day shall come unto thee, to cause thee to hear it with thine ears? In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the Lord."

There is one great poem in the Hebrew Scriptures so remarkable and exceptional in every respect, that to pass over it without special comment, would be to disregard wilfully one of the principal phenomena from which every adequate appreciation of the characteristics of the Old-Testament poetry should be derived—the drama of Job. I have reserved my conception of it to the last, because it seems to me that the highest critical

authorities must be right in thinking that it is nearly the latest, as well as the only formally artistic, product of the poetic genius of the Jews. This, at least, is in *intention*, as well as in fact, a literary effort,—an attempt to present, and perhaps more or less to solve, in a dramatic form some of the highest problems of our spiritual life. It is the only important book in the Old Testament which is not closely interwoven with the real history and life of the nation,—which stands apart as a *conscious* effort of imagination.

No doubt, the Book of Job marks in many ways the culmination of the national genius, and the transition from the exclusively divine centre of the Hebrew poetic thought to the wider range of insight into Nature and Man, from the natural as well as the supernatural side, which was to succeed it. The very treatment of a divine theme under the human conditions of an imaginary drama, would alone appear to indicate this. The conflict with the narrowly Jewish conceptions of Providence which it contains, would also indicate it. The contemplative delight which the wonders of Nature and the mysteries of animal life arouse in the writer's mind, and the naturalistic minuteness with which they are painted, as well as the delineation of the inward perplexities of the spiritual life, all point to an origin in an age when that more genial appreciation of Nature and man which we perceive in the later prophecies bearing the name of Isaiah had been carried even further. Moreover, as regards man himself, the whole argument turns on the

subtle distinction between that part of his nature which, finite and shortsighted though he is, yet gives him a right to claim a real affinity with God, and that part which, finite and limited as it is, necessarily obscures his power of judgment. This is not a point which could well have been discussed in an early period of the Jewish literature.

There is an evident effort throughout the drama to distinguish the "creature" in Job from that "spirit" in him which gives him a right to plead with God. The drama is usually understood as a mere exposure of the false view which makes calamity a certain index of the wrath of God and therefore of guilt. This, no doubt, it is; but it is also much more. It is a discussion of the mystery of God's relation to man and to the lower universe. There is an effort, I believe, in the poem to show that man is related to God in two ways,—as a spiritual being, and as a creature. As a spiritual being, he may justify himself and speak what God himself cannot override, and will certainly affirm: as a creature, he is in complete ignorance of the lot it may be right for the ruler of the universe to assign him; since He only can judge who sees the universe as a whole, who moves the very springs of its life. Man cannot, and ought not to accuse Providence of injustice in any external lot He may send, unless he could undertake to wield the whole scheme of Providence in His place; then, and then only, might he "disannul" God's judgment, and condemn Him in order "to establish his own righteousness." The

ignorant *creature* is wrong in criticising the acts of the Creator; but the *spirit* of the man is right in asserting the absolute character of his highest spiritual convictions against any array of external argument. Job is sustained in his assertion that though his body should be destroyed, yet a living Redeemer should vindicate his inward purity; he is sustained in reiterating, "God forbid that I should justify you till I die: I will not remove mine integrity from me; my righteousness will I hold fast and will not let it go;" he is sustained in holding fast by the judgment of his spirit on his own actions, for that is a judgment with full knowledge: but he is condemned for judging God's outward conduct to him by any standard whatever; since in doing so he judges by "words without knowledge," seeing that the knowledge requisite for such judgment would be the omniscience of the Creator himself. The argument is illustrated with the fullest delineation of the mystery of Nature, the broadest contrast between the narrow circle of spiritual knowledge and independence really reserved to man, and to man alone, and the utter incompetence of man to wield a single attribute of Providence either over his own world or that of the lower creation. How minute and full of naturalistic observation and artistic admiration is the treatment of the order of Nature, the following passage will adequately show:—

"Gavest thou wings and feathers to the ostrich? which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust; and forgetteth that the foot of man may crush them, or that the wild-beast may

break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labour is in vain without fear; because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding. What time she lifteth herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider. Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage; neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting."

This deeper insight into the natural constitution and beauty of the universe, and complete disavowal of all power on the part of man to form any judgment upon it, is especially remarkable as compared with the bold justification of the spiritual participation of human nature in one of the attributes of God. It proves that the Hebrew poet had already distinguished between the direct knowledge of God's Spirit which spiritual communion gives, and the indirect knowledge of His mysterious ways which can only be gained by a study of those ways. It shows that he had mastered the conviction, that to neglect the study of the natural mysteries of the universe leads to an arrogant and illicit intrusion of moral and spiritual assumptions into a different world,—in a word, to the false inferences of Job's friends as to his guilt, and his own equally false inference as to the injustice of God.

Here, then, we have the Hebrew imagination in a

state of transition. It is still occupied, almost entirely, with the divine side of creation,—the holiness and omnipotence of God, and the feebleness of man; but already a sincere admiration for natural life, and power, and beauty, begins to be seen; and humanity asserts its own share in the life of the divine righteousness in clearer tones than in any of the older prophets. In short, that unique type of poetry, which is expressed and symbolised in the tradition of Jacob's dream is beginning to disappear. In all the characteristic poetry of Israel man seems to lie enveloped in the darkness of earth; yet with a stream of supernatural radiance cast upon him from that opening in the heavens above, through which forms of light ascend and descend. For the rest, the heaven is dark with the clouds which veil Omnipotence, and the earth has no proper radiance of its own; while the grandeur of the effect is heightened by the Rembrandt-like contrast of light and shadow. In the later prophecies of Isaiah—generally attributed by modern critics to a later prophet,—and the great poem of Job, this startling narrowness and intensity of effect is visibly on the decline. The clouds of Omnipotence begin to break; the intrinsic beauty of Nature begins to be more closely associated with the spiritual lights of heaven, and humanity especially to have a distinct standing point and radiance of its own. From this time the marvellously unique poetry of Israel ceases, and ceases never to be revived. But the supernaturalism which it discerned so vividly as brooding over the early world

does not cease with it. It has transmuted for ever the pure naturalism of Greek poetry. And now no modern poet can ever become really great who does not feel and reproduce in his writings the characteristic difference between that mild inner light which "lightens every man that cometh into the world," which grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength, and that which, descending suddenly from God upon the startled conscience, makes us exclaim: "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

VI.

GEORGE ELIOT.

THE great authoress who calls herself George Eliot is chiefly known, and no doubt deserves to be chiefly known, in England, as a novelist, but she is certainly much more than a novelist in the sense in which that word applies even to writers of great genius, to Miss Austen, or Mr. Trollope,—nay, much more than a novelist in the sense in which that word applies to Miss Brontë or even to Thackeray, though it is of course true in relation to all these writers, that besides being much more, she is also, and necessarily, not so much. What is remarkable in George Eliot is the striking combination in her of very deep speculative power with a very great and realistic imagination. It is rare to find an intellect so skilled in the analysis of the deepest psychological problems, so completely at home in the conception and delineation of real characters. George Eliot discusses the practical influences acting on men and women, I do not say with the *ease* of Fielding,—for there

is a touch of carefulness, often of over-carefulness in all she does,—but with much of his breadth and spaciousness,—the breadth and spaciousness, one must remember, of a man who had seen London life in the capacity of a London police magistrate. Nay, her imagination has, I do not say of course the fertility, but something of the range and the delight in rich historic colouring, of Sir Walter Scott's, while it combines with it something too of the pleasure in ordered learning, and the laborious marshalling of the picturesque results of learning,—though her learning is usually in a very different field,—which gives the flavour of scholastic pride to the great genius of Milton. Not that I think George Eliot's fine verse entitles her to be described as a poet, though the poetic side of her mind has been deep enough and true enough to lend richness, depth, and harmony to her romances. I am only pointing out now how much she is besides a novelist,—how inevitable it was that in her novels she should range far beyond the region of the most successful novelists of recent times,—far beyond that little world of English society which has determined for novelists of the most different type of genius,—for Miss Austen, for Mrs. Gaskell, for Mr. Trollope, for Thackeray, and for many less successful, but still very successful contemporaries,—their peculiar field of work.

It is, indeed, a great help towards understanding her true genius to compare George Eliot with the school of society-novelists of whom I have spoken. What one remarks about the works of those who have studied

any particular society as a whole far more deeply than they have studied the individual characters in it, is that their creations all stand on one level, are delineated, with great accuracy, down to the same not very considerable depth, and no further; that all, in short, are bas-reliefs cut out on the same surface. The novelists of this school are perfectly inexhaustible in resource on the special social ground they choose, and quite incapable of varying it. And all of them disappoint us in not giving more insight into those deeper roots of character which lie beneath the social surface. Probably the mobile sympathies which are so essential to artists of this class, and the faculty of readily realising, and of being easily satisfied with realising, the workings of other minds, are to some extent inconsistent with that imaginative intensity and tenacity which is needful for the deeper insight into human character. Certainly the accomplished artists I have named carve out their marvellously life-like groups in a very shallow though sufficiently plastic material. How perfect and how infinitely various are the images left on the mind by the characters in Miss Austen's novels! Lord Macaulay has expressed just admiration of the skill which could paint four young clergymen, "all belonging to the upper part of the middle class, all liberally educated, all under the restraints of the same sacred profession, all young, all in love, all free from any disposition to ride a special hobby, and all without a ruling passion," without making them insipid likenesses of each other. And no doubt

this does show great power; but it is equally remarkable that all of them are drawn just to the same depth, all delineated out of the same social elements. None of their minds are exhibited in any direct contact with the ultimate realities of life; none of them are seen grasping at the truth by which they seek to live, struggling with a single deadly temptation,—or, in short, with any of the deeper elements of human life. The same may almost be said of Thackeray's, Mr. Trollope's, and Mrs. Gaskell's sketches. These authors, indeed, sometimes probe the motives of their leading characters, but they generally report that at a very small depth below the surface the analysis fails to detect any certain result. The whole graphic effect of their art is produced with scarcely any disturbance of the smooth surface of social usage. The artist's graver just scratches off the wax in a few given directions till the personal bias of taste and bearing is sufficiently revealed, while the pervading principle of the society in which the artist lives is strictly preserved.

It was very different with Miss Brontë. Her imagination was not, and under the circumstances of her life could not have been, at home with the light play of social influences. There is even an abruptness of outline, a total want of social cohesion among her characters. They are sternly drawn, with much strong shading, and kept in isolated spheres. They break, or rather burst, in upon each other, when they exert mutual influences at all, with a rude effort, that is significant enough of the

shyness of a solitary creative imagination. Still, for this very reason, what characters Miss Brontë does conceive truly, she reveals much more deeply than the society-novelists of whom I have been speaking. She has no familiarity with the delicate touches and shades by which they succeed in conveying a distinct impression without laying bare the deeper secrets of character. She has not, like them, any power of giving in her delineations *traces* of thought and feeling which lie beyond her actual grasp. She has a full and conscious hold of all the moods she paints; and though her paintings are in nine cases out of ten far less lifelike, yet *when* lifelike they are far more profoundly imagined than those of Mr. Trollope, Miss Austen, Mrs. Gaskell or even Thackeray himself. There is as little common life, diffused atmosphere of thought, and there are as few connecting social ideas, amongst the various figures in Miss Brontë's tales as is possible to conceive among fellow-men and fellow-countrymen. But what personal life there is, is of the deepest sort, though it is apt to be too exceptional and individual, and too little composed out of elements of universal experience.

The novelists of the society-school, who delineate not so much individual figures as a complete phase of society, have what one may call a *medium* ready to their hand in which to trace the characteristic features of the natures they delineate. They have a familiar world of manners to paint, in which a modulation, an omission, or an emphasis here and there, are quite sufficient to

mark a character, or indicate a latent emotion. Not so an author who, like Miss Brontë, endeavoured to fit all her characters with a new and appropriate outward manner of their own as distinct and special as the inward nature it expressed. With her there was necessarily a *directness* of delineation, a strong downrightness in the drawing which is in very marked contrast with the method that charms us so much in the pictures of Miss Austen and her modern successors. Much of the art of the drawing-room novelists consists in the indirectness, the allusiveness, the educated reticence of the artists. They portray a society; they *indicate* an individuality. They delight in fine strokes; they will give a long conversation which scarcely advances the narrative at all, for the sake of a few delicate touches of shade or colour on an individual character. In the power to paint this play of common social life, in which there are comparatively but few key-notes of distinct personality, the charm of this school of art consists; while Miss Brontë's lay in the Rembrandt-like distinctness with which all that the mind conceived was brought into the full blaze of light, and the direct vigour with which all the prominent features were marked out.

George Eliot as a novelist has points of connection with both of these schools of art, beside some characteristics peculiarly her own. There is the same flowing ease of manner, clearness of drawing, delicacy of finish, and absence of excitement, which characterise the modern semi-satirical school. But there is less of play in the

surface-painting,—more of depth in the deeper characters imagined,—a broader touch, a stronger, directer fashion of delineation,—less of manner-paintings, and more of the bare naturalism of human life. On the other hand, there is nothing of the Rembrandt-like style of Miss Brontë: the light flows more equally over George Eliot's pictures; one finds nothing of the irregular emphasis with which Currer Bell's characters are drawn, or of the strong subjective colouring which tinges all her scenes. George Eliot's imagination, like Miss Brontë's, loves to go to the roots of character, and portrays best by broad direct strokes; but there the likeness between them, so far as there is any, ends. The reasons for the deeper method and for the directer style are hardly likely to have been similar in the two cases. Miss Brontë can scarcely be said to have had any large instinctive knowledge of human nature:—her own life and thoughts were exceptional, cast in a strongly-marked but not very wide mould; her imagination was solitary; her experience was very limited; and her own personality tinged all she wrote. She "made out" the outward life and manner of her *dramatis personæ* by the sheer force of her own imagination; and as she always imagined the will and the affections as the substance and centre of her characters, those of her delineations which are successful at all are deep, and their manner broad.

George Eliot's genius is exceedingly different. Her genial, broad delineations of human life have, as I said just now, more perhaps of the breadth of Fielding than

of any of the manners-painters of the present day. For these imagine life only as it appears in a certain dress and sphere, which are a kind of artificial medium for their art,—life as affected by drawing-rooms. George Eliot has little, if any, of their capacity for catching the under-tones and allusive complexity of this sort of society. She has, however, observed the phases of a more natural and straightforward class of life, and she draws her external world as much as possible from observation—though some of her Florentine pictures must have been suggested more by literary study than by personal experience —instead of *imagining* it, like Miss Brontë, out of the heart of the characters she wishes to paint. The English manners she delights in are chiefly of the simplest and most homely kind,—of the rural farmers and labourers, —of the half-educated portion of the country middle-class, who have learnt no educated reticence,—and of the resident country gentry and clergy in their relations with these rough-mannered neighbours. This is a world in which she could not but learn a direct style of treatment. The habit of concealing, or at most of suggesting rather than downright expressing, what is closest to our hearts, is, as we know, a result of education. It is quite foreign to the class of people whom George Eliot knows most thoroughly, and has drawn with the fullest power. All her deepest knowledge of human nature has probably been acquired among people who speak their thoughts with the directness, though not with the sharp metallic ring, of Miss Brontë's Yorkshire heroes. But instead of

almost luxuriating, as Miss Brontë appears to do, in the startling emphasis of this mannerism, and making all her characters precipitate themselves in speech in the way best calculated to give a strongly-marked picture of the conception in her own brain,—George Eliot has evidently delighted to note all the varieties of form which varying circumstances give to these direct and simple manners, and takes as much pleasure in painting their different shades as Miss Austen does in guiding her more elaborate conversations to and fro so as to elicit traits of personal character. Directness of delineation is, indeed, evidently natural to the author of 'Adam Bede,' but it has no tendency whatever to take, with her, that form of concentrated intensity, which it assumed in Miss Brontë: her style has all the general composure and range of tone of the life she paints, and shows her as much in sympathy with the dumb and stolid phases of rural society as with its more active forms. There was something of the poet in both. But George Eliot's poetry is rooted in the more intellectual emotions, Miss Brontë's was in the most personal. George Eliot's poetic tendencies are rather of the kind to soften outlines and harmonize the effects of her pictures. Miss Brontë's, on the other hand, were adapted to express the passion of her own imagination; and while the effect was graphic and unique, it was monotonous, and not unfrequently unreal.

George Eliot's pictures are not only directer and simpler than those of the drawing-room novelists, but her

deeper and frequently poetic imagination discriminates finely betwixt the various degrees of depth which she gives to her characters, and throws more of universality and breadth into them. The manners of "good society" are a kind of social costume or disguise, which is, in fact, much more effective in concealing how much of depth ordinary characters have, and in restraining the expression of universal human instincts and feelings, than in hiding the individualities, the distinguishing inclinations, talents, bias, and tastes of those who assume them. The slight restraints which are imposed by society upon the expression of individual bias are, in fact, only a new excitement to its more subtle and various, though less straightforward, development. Instead of speaking itself simply out, it gleams out in a hundred ways by the side-paths of a more elaborate medium. To avail yourself skilfully of all the opportunities which these social manners admit of *being yourself*, adds a fresh, though very egotistic, interest to life, and gives much of the zest to the sort of study in which Thackeray and Mr. Trollope are the acknowledged masters. But this applies only to the lighter and more superficial part of human personality. Those stronger passions and emotions in which all men share more or less deeply; which are in the strictest sense personal, and yet in the strictest sense universal; which are private, because either the objects or the occasions which excite them most deeply are different for every different person, and universal, because towards some objects, or on some occasions, they are felt alike

by all;—these most personal and most widely diffused of all the elements of human nature are sedulously suppressed in cultivated society; and even the most skilful of the drawing-room novelists find little room for delineating the comparative depth of their roots in different minds.

And yet these deepest portions of human character, which the simpler and less educated grades of society, in their comparative indifference to the sympathy they receive, do not care to hide, and which educated society half suppresses, or expresses only by received formulas quite without personal significance, are far truer measures of force and mass in human character than any other elements. They are, in fact, the only *common* measures which are applicable to all in nearly equal degree. After all, what we care chiefly to know of men and women, is not so much their special tastes, bias, gifts, humours, or even the exact proportions in which these characteristics are combined,—as the general depth and mass of the human nature that is in them,—the breadth and the power of their life,—its comprehensiveness of grasp, its tenacity of instinct, its capacity for love, its need of trust. A thousand skilful outlines of character based on mere individualities of taste and talent and temper, are not near as moving to us as one vivid picture of a massive nature stirred to the very depths of its commonplace instinct and commonplace faith. And the means of studying these broader aspects of human life are much fewer in the educated society which Miss Austen

and Thackeray draw, than in the country-towns, mills, and farm-houses, which are dotted about George Eliot's 'Scenes from Clerical Life,' 'Silas Marner,' and her more elaborate English tales.

In the depth, force, and thorough naturalness of the human characteristics in the delineation of which she delights, George Eliot is not superior to Miss Brontë, who never fails to give us a distinct measure of the instinctive tenderness, depth of affection, and energy of will, of her creations. But in breadth of range George Eliot is far beyond Currer Bell. Intensity is the main characteristic of the authoress of 'Jane Eyre.' She cannot paint quiet massive strength, still less, easy, composed, and inert natures. George Eliot enters into these with even more insight than into the more concentrated. Eager prejudice, dumb pain, the passive famine of inarticulate desires, are painted by both authors with marvellous and almost equal power; but George Eliot has the wider and more tranquil sympathies; and sometimes almost seems to rival Sir Walter Scott in the art of delineating the repose of strong natures and the effortless strength they put forth.

Again, in one field—the field of religious faith—the author of 'Adam Bede' and 'Romola' shows much broader insight than any of the writers I have named. The drawing-room school of novelists do not and cannot often go down to a stratum of life deep enough to come upon the springs of faith. Miss Austen never touches them. Thackeray turns dizzy with the very mobility of

his own sympathies, and finding a distinct type of faith in every different man's mind, not only proclaims the inscrutability of all divine topics, but refuses to assign any strong motive power to religious emotions at all in his delineations of human life. Miss Brontë, too, finds it needful to eliminate the supernatural, though she once or twice admits the preternatural, in her pictures. As an artist she is strictly a secularist, delineating religious enthusiasm only once, and then exhibiting it as the stimulus of a cold nature and as putting forth unlawful claims to overrule legitimate human affections. Even Sir Walter Scott, powerfully as he could paint fanaticism, and keen as was his pleasure in the marvellous, never attempted to paint the quieter and deeper forms of religious faith. He evidently did not admit any supernatural element into his conception of sensible men and women, and never paints its influence over a sober and tranquil will.

Apparently, George Eliot, also,—if I may judge by hints she drops here and there in her various asides to the reader, from the relative place she gives to the supernatural element in her different characters, and from her poems,—agrees with Thackeray that divine things are inscrutable, and that the stronger class of intellects meddle least with the subject, at all events intellectually. But she sees far more clearly than any of them the actual space occupied by spiritual motives in human life,—the depth, beauty, and significance which they, and they alone, give to human action. And, accordingly, in

almost all her tales she introduces some character with conscious cravings for something beyond human happiness; while in the most perfect and popular of her works she delineates the most delicately beautiful and spiritual nature with which I have ever met in the whole range of fiction. Goethe's picture of the Fair Saint in 'Wilhelm Meister' cannot properly be said to belong to fiction at all. Not only is it, in fact, a minute copy from real life, but it is not even woven by his imagination into the texture of his story. It is an episode of mere description, and the character is not delineated in action. Nay, in itself, the 'Schöne Seele' which Goethe has so delicately mirrored for us cannot compare in simplicity and beauty with Dinah in 'Adam Bede.'

Another element in which George Eliot shows the masculine breadth and strength of her genius adds less to the charm of her tales,—I mean the shrewdness and miscellaneous range of her observations on life. Nothing is rarer than to see in women's writings that kind of strong acute generalisation which Fielding introduced so freely. Yet the miscellaneous observations in which George Eliot so often indulges us, after the fashion of the day, are not always well suited to the particular bent of her genius; indeed, they often break the spell which that genius has laid upon her readers. She is not a satirist, and she half adopts the style of a satirist in these elements of her books. The influence of Thackeray had at first a distinctly bad effect on her genius, but in 'Silas Marner' that influence began to wane, and quite

disappeared in 'Romola,' though I think it reappeared a little in 'Felix Holt.' A powerful and direct style of portraiture is in ill-keeping with that flavour of sarcastic inuendo in which Thackeray delighted. It jars upon the ear in the midst of the simple and faithful delineations of human nature as it really is, with which George Eliot fills her books. It was all very well for Thackeray who made it his main aim and business to expose the hollowness and insincerities of human society, to add his own keen comment to his own one-sided picture. But then it was of the essence of his genius to lay bare unrealities, and leave the sound life almost untouched. It was rather a relief than otherwise to see him playing with his dissecting-knife after one of his keenest probing feats; you understand better how limited his purpose is,—that he has been in search of organic disease,—and you are not surprised, therefore, to find that he has found little that was healthy.

But George Eliot has a different power. She can delineate what is sound even more powerfully than what is unsound. She does not *expose* but paints human nature, its weakness and its strength; and the satirical tone in which Thackeray justified to his readers the severity of his criticisms, by trying to show that they were all of them open to criticisms at least as severe, is a setting not at all in harmony with George Eliot's style of art. This is, indeed, usually so deep, direct, and real, that the interruption needed to listen to the author's aside is a painful break. It would suit her books far

better if in this respect she followed Miss Brontë's eager and undeviating style of narration, and never indulged in the pleasure of being her own critic. But if she must intersperse her narratives with comments and thoughts of her own, she could not have found a less suitable tone for them than that satirical contempt for his readers' unreal state of mind to which the author of 'Vanity Fair' accustomed us. When in the midst of an admirable sketch of the farm-labourers on Mr. Poyser's farm, by no means ill-natured in itself, we come upon such a sentence as this, for instance:—"When Tityrus and Melibœus happen to be on the same farm, they are not sentimentally polite to each other,"—we feel suddenly transported to the latitude of 'Vanity Fair.' Often it is only that observations themselves not ungenial are clothed in the half-scornful language which Thackeray's success induced so many light writers to adopt. For example, there is in the chapter which opens as follows nothing that is not genial and wise; but throughout the whole there runs a tone of bantering depreciation,—a "what a vulgar world it is we live in" sort of air, which has no justification either in the tenor of what is said, or the particular incident on which it is a comment:—

"'This Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!' I hear one of my lady readers exclaim. 'How much more edifying it would have been if you had made him give Arthur some truly spiritual advice! You might have put into his mouth the most beautiful things—quite as good as reading a sermon.' Certainly I could, my fair critic, if I were a clever novelist, not obliged to creep servilely after nature and fact, but able to represent things as they never

have been and never will be. Then, of course, my characters would be entirely of my own choosing, and I could select the most unexceptionable type of clergyman, and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions."

This is, when read in its context, sarcasm quite out of its natural element, floundering like a fish out of water. Indeed, this foreign mannerism gives a certain air of laborious *smartness* to the chapters of comment in 'Adam Bede,' which seems to me the only defect in that wonderful book. That which was only an external mannerism in the occasional commentary of 'Adam Bede,' grew into a rankling foreign substance in the 'Mill on the Floss,' and it was a great relief to her admirers to find that in her later works, especially 'Silas Marner' and 'Romola,' George Eliot had in a great degree discontinued it.

For certainly she is no satirist. Even where her banter is best, hers is not the bent to bring out without effort, and yet in full relief, the weak points of men, as the genius of satire requires; and one cannot but feel painfully, that, like most able people who do what it is not their bent to do, she overdoes it, and breaks a butterfly on the wheel. How lightly and tauntingly Thackeray would have given us the following! how broadly ludicrous Dickens might have made it! but in George Eliot's hands it is neither broad fun nor indirect satire, but laborious intellectual power commenting, with painfully painstaking analysis, on human foibles:—

"It is a pathetic sight and a striking example of the complexity introduced into the emotions by a high state of civilisation—the

sight of a fashionably-drest female in grief. From the sorrow of a Hottentot to that of a woman in large buckram sleeves, with several bracelets on each arm, an architectural bonnet, and delicate ribbon-strings—what a long series of gradations! In the enlightened child of civilisation the abandonment characteristic of grief is checked and varied in the subtlest manner, so as to present an interesting problem to the analytic mind. If, with a crushed heart and eyes half-blinded by the mist of tears, she were to walk with a too devious step through a door-place, she might crush her buckram sleeves too, and the deep consciousness of this possibility produces a composition of forces by which she takes a line that just clears the doorpost. Perceiving that the tears are hurrying fast, she unpins her strings and throws them languidly backward —a touching gesture, indicative, even in the deepest gloom, of the hope in future dry moments when cap-strings will once more have a charm. As the tears subside a little, and with her head leaning backward at the angle that will not injure a bonnet, she endures that terrible moment when grief, which has made all things else a weariness, has itself become weary; she looks down pensively at her bracelets, and adjusts their clasps with that pretty studied fortuity which would be gratifying to her mind if it were once more in a calm and healthy state."

George Eliot's humour, which is very great, is not of the ironical or satirical kind. The covert meaning which aims at one thing while it appears to say another is not in her way. The humour in which she excels most has nothing in it of the self-command and reticence which give the edge to irony. The satirist just moves away sufficiently from the station at which for the moment his character is placed to show you how one-sided and shallow that character is; but he keeps on the mask of sympathy, though he allows you to see him smiling under it; and half the sting of his irony consists in his assuming that the weakness probed is too deeply rooted

in human nature to mock at openly, though you need not shut your eyes to it.

There is nothing of this species of humour in George Eliot. She has a large share of that dramatic humour of which Shakespeare's is the model, which consists in a rapid and complete change of moral and intellectual latitude, in showing us the strangely different views of human things,—vulgar, contemplative, and practical,—which differently situated beings take. Of this kind of humour there is no more perfect and delightful specimen than the scene in which she paints the unflinching (or as we might falsely say, indelicate) feeling of the uneducated towards Death and the necessary accompaniments of Death, as illustrated by Lisbeth Bede's wishes about her husband's coffin and funeral.

"What art goin' to do?' asked Lisbeth. 'Set about thy feyther's coffin?'

'No, mother,' said Adam; 'we're going to take the wood to the village, and have it made there.'

'Nay, my lad, nay,' Lisbeth burst out in an eager, wailing tone; 'thee wotna let nobody make thy feyther's coffin but thysen? Who'd make it so well? An' him as know'd what good work war, an 's got a son as is th' head o' the village, an' all Treddles'on too, for cleverness.'

'Very well, mother, if that's thy wish, I'll make the coffin at home; but I thought thee wouldstna like to hear the work going on.'

'An' why shouldna I like 't? It's the right thing to be done. An' what's likin got to do wi 't? It's choice o' mislikins is all I'n got i' this world. One mossel's as good as another when your mouth's out o' taste. Thee mun set about it now this mornin' fust thing. I wunna ha' nobody to touch the coffin but thee.'

Adam's eyes met Seth's, which looked from Dinah to him rather wistfully.

"No, mother,' he said, 'I'll not consent; but Seth shall have a hand in it too, if it's to be done at home. I'll go to the village this forenoon, because Mr. Burge 'ull want to see me, and Seth shall stay at home and begin the coffin. I can come back at noon, and then he can go.'

'Nay, nay,' persisted Lisbeth, beginning to cry, 'I 'n set my heart on 't as thee shalt ma' thy feyther's coffin. Thee 't so stiff an' masterful, thee 't ne'er do as thy mother wants thee. Thee wast often angered wi' thy feyther when he war alive; thee must be the better to 'm now he's goen.' *He'd ha' thought nothin' on 't for Seth to ma 's coffin.*'"

Some of George Eliot's most subtle and characteristic humour consists in giving to the conversation of her rural louts a distinct, though of course unconscious, bearing on the intellectual questions contemporaneously discussed by the most highly cultivated, without coming to any much more impressive results. Even when this is not the case, there is a humour in the mere sharpness of the contrast between the favourite subjects of her boors and those of refined society. Thus, in the inimitable conversation at the opening of 'Silas Marner,' —the conversation in the Rainbow Inn—the subject is simply and solely one to excite the professional interest of butchers and of all connoisseurs in grazing stock. But the pungency is given by the grotesqueness of the contrast between the professional interests of the lower and middle classes, and by that additional flavour of professionality which every descent in the scale of education certainly insures.

The conversation, which was at a high pitch of animation when Silas approached the door of the Rainbow, had, as usual, been slow

and intermittent when the company first assembled. The pipes began to be puffed in a silence which had an air of severity; the more important customers, who drank spirits and sat nearest the fire, staring at each other as if a bet were depending on the first man who winked; while the beer-drinkers, chiefly men in fustian jackets and smock-frocks, kept their eyelids down and rubbed their hands across their mouths, as if their draughts of beer had been a funereal duty attended with embarrassing sadness. At last, Mr. Snell, the landlord, a man of a neutral disposition, accustomed to stand aloof from human differences as those of beings who were all alike in need of liquor, broke silence, by saying in a doubtful tone to his cousin the butcher,—

"Some folks 'ud say that was a fine beast you druv in yesterday, Bob?"

The butcher, a jolly, smiling, red-haired man, was not disposed to answer rashly. He gave a few puffs before he spat and replied, "And they wouldn't be fur wrong, John."

After this feeble delusive thaw, the silence set in as severely as before.

"Was it a red Durham?" said the farrier, taking up the thread of discourse after the lapse of a few minutes.

The farrier looked at the landlord, and the landlord looked at the butcher, as the person who must take the responsibility of answering.

"Red it was," said the butcher, in his good-humoured husky treble—"and a Durham it was."

"Then you needn't tell *me* who you bought it of," said the farrier, looking round with some triumph; "I know who it is has got the red Durhams o' this country-side. And she'd a white star on her brow, I'll bet a penny?" The farrier leaned forward with his hands on his knees as he put this question, and his eyes twinkled knowingly.

"Well; yes—she might," said the butcher, slowly, considering that he was giving a decided affirmative. "I don't say contrary."

"I knew that very well," said the farrier, throwing himself backward again and speaking defiantly; "if *I* don't know Mr. Lammeter's cows, I should like to know who does—that's all. And as for the cow you've bought, bargain or no bargain, I've been at the drenching of her—contradick me who will."

The farrier looked fierce, and the mild butcher's conversational spirit was roused a little.

"I'm not for contradicking no man," he said; "I'm for peace and quietness. Some are for cutting long ribs—I'm for cutting 'em short, myself; but *I* don't quarrel with 'em. All I say is, it's a lovely carkiss—and anybody as was reasonable, it 'ud bring tears into their eyes to look at it."

"Well, it's the cow as I drenched, whatever it is," pursued the farrier, angrily; "and it was Mr. Lammeter's cow, else you told a lie when you said it was a red Durham."

"I tell no lies," said the butcher, with the same mild huskiness as before; "and I contradick none—not if a man was to swear himself black: he's no meat o' mine, nor none of my bargains. All I say is, it's a lovely carkiss. And what I say I'll stick to; but I'll quarrel wi' no man."

"No," said the farrier, with bitter sarcasm, looking at the company generally; "and p'rhaps you aren't pig-headed; and p'rhaps you didn't say the cow was a red Durham; and p'rhaps you didn't say she'd got a star on her brow—stick to that, now you're at it."

"Come, come," said the landlord; "let the cow alone. The truth lies atween you: you're both right and both wrong, as I allays say. And as for the cow's being Mr. Lammeter's, I say nothing to that; but this I say, as the Rainbow's the Rainbow."

But as soon as Mr. Macey, the parish clerk and tailor, enters into the conversation, a faint shadow of the intellectual phases of "modern thought,"—just sufficient to remind the reader of the form which they take in the present day, without in any way marring the truth of the picture,—begins to fall on it. Mr. Macey has fallen upon some appropriate form of the difficulty of distinguishing between the "subjective" and the "objective." He it is who tells us that "there's allays two 'pinions; there's the 'pinion a man has of himsen, and there's the 'pinion other folks have on him. There'd be two 'pinions

about a cracked bell if the bell could hear itself." And further, in discussing the error of a bride and bridegroom who had interchanged their respective responses in the marriage service, he throws up the difficult question as to the relation between "substance" and "form." "Is it the meaning or the words as makes folks fast in wedlock? For the parson meant right, and the bride and bridegroom meant right. But then, when I come to think on it, meanin' goes but a little way i' most things, for you may mean to stick things together, and your glue may be bad, and then where are you? And so I says to mysen, 'It isn't the meanin', it's the glue.' And I was worreted as if I'd got three bells to pull at once. . . . But where's the use o' talking?—you can't think what goes on in a 'cute man's inside."

There is also in George Eliot abundance of what always accompanies dramatic humour,—I mean a great fertility in illustrative analogies which go to the very heart of a one-sided view of any question. Of this Mrs. Poyser's justly-admired wit is the most obvious example. When, for instance, she wishes to impress upon Dinah that her village convert's piety is an artificial result of her own personal influence, and cannot outlast her absence a day, what can be more felicitous than her simile? "There's that Bessy Cranage, she'll be flaunting in new finery three weeks after you're gone, I'll be bound: she'll no more go on in her new ways without you than a dog 'ull stand on its hind legs when nobody's looking."

But while George Eliot's imagination is opulent enough in its power of dramatic humour, in its capacity for easily migrating from one moral latitude to another, and fertile enough in illustration of any view, or any character it once grasps, one sees in the third volume of the 'Mill on the Floss,' and partly, I think, in the somewhat laborious gossip of the Florentine society in 'Romola,' that there is no proportionate power of indirectly portraying character by the side-lights and shadows of easy general conversation,—a power which generally distinguishes feminine novelists. In the picture of life as it passed in St. Ogg's drawing-rooms, she falls so much below herself that this, it is quite clear, is not her natural field of art. With all her subtlety and intellectual power, which are obviously great, and her humour, which is greater, she falls far short of many who are greatly her inferiors in genius, in her attempt to delineate character through this tranquil play of educated social intercourse. Take up almost any scene in Thackeray or Mr. Trollope, and you will find a conversation in which, without any formal discussion, every character seems to be answering by some slight modification in its own tone to the chords struck by the others. This sort of play of character is mainly a fruit of social elasticity. The type of mind in the uncultivated classes, whom George Eliot has made her chief study, is much stiffer and more monotonous. The latter change with the changes in their own mood, but do not suffer the same subtle modifications of tone and feeling from social influences, which

you perceive in educated life. George Eliot has but little skill in delineating this social phenomenon. Her imagination requires to have a distinct conception of the mood or thought to be seized before she can paint it. There is nothing of that easy modulation (grasped by instinct rather than by imagination) in the conversation of her educated people, which constitutes half its charm, and which gives to the modern novelist so wide a field for indirect portraiture. Among Miss Austen's scenes, for instance, George Eliot might perhaps have written those between people of a totally different social level, as, for example, the humorous scenes between the Miss Steeles and the Miss Dashwoods in 'Sense and Sensibility.' But the third volume of the 'Mill on the Floss' seems to show that the delicately-delineated play of feeling between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in 'Pride and Prejudice,' or between Emma and Jane Fairfax in 'Emma,' would have been quite out of her sphere. It is much more difficult for an Englishman to criticise her very elaborate picture of the gossip of Florentine market-places, but to me there seems a constant over-laboriousness even there.

Indeed, there are probably no two more different types of genius than that which excels in indirect and that which excels in direct delineation. And George Eliot, like Sir Walter Scott, is always most successful with the broadest and simplest modes in which human character expresses itself. In short, for masculine composure and range of sympathy, for strength of grasp

in dealing with universal human feelings, for skill in habitually realising to us that individual differences of character are engrafted on a fundamental community of nature,—she has no rival among the literary artists of the present day. And though it is in part a logical consequence of these great gifts, yet, as I have shown, it is exceptional enough to deserve separate notice, and adds indefinitely to the charm they exercise, that she has a keen sense of that infinite hunger of the spirit which nothing human can appease, and a true eye for the inward conditions, by the rare fulfilment of which that hunger is satisfied.

While 'Romola' will very probably prove to be the favourite work of this great artist with the few who appreciate it thoroughly, and 'Silas Marner' is the richest triumph of her humour, 'Adam Bede' is always likely to remain George Eliot's most popular work. It is a story of which any English author, however great his name, could not fail to have been proud. Every thing about it (if I except perhaps a touch of melodrama connected with the execution scene) is at once simple and great, and the plot is unfolded with singular simplicity, purity, and power. George Eliot is evidently a writer who needs a plot of great natural interest, and with a natural unity of its own, to unfold fully the resources of her genius. She has none of the concentrative and subjective intensity of Miss Brontë; her lights flow equally over her pictures; and it is their tendency to *over*flow. Her first publication, 'Scenes

from Clerical Life,' of which the first and last are quite loose sketches without any natural unity, show the characteristic freedom of her manner. She finds it difficult to concentrate her own interest, and therefore to concentrate her readers' interest, on any one particular current of life. Her genius delights in depicting the life of a little community; and even when she has got a really deep interest at work on her village stage, she is always anxious to remind herself and her readers how the general population are doing meanwhile in spite of it,—to picture them as they are, quite unconscious of the unfolding plot and living out their ordinary lives in the ordinary way, with but few half-curious glances at the slowly-maturing crisis.

This tendency gives a great charm to a tale in which the interest is really profound; for it turns the story from a mere narrative of individual perils, trials, joys, and sorrows, into a vivid illustration of the common human lot. There is a concentrated sort of egotism about common novels, even of a high order of talent, which is one reason why the interest in them is apt to die away in riper years. Sir Walter Scott's novels are never iron-bound by this purely individual kind of interest: to children they seem far too discursive, too little limited to the particular story; but his tales retain among the mature the popularity which they have in youth in great measure on this very account, that they range so pleasantly beyond the borders of the immediate narrative, and give us so wide a knowledge of the great

common life in the heart of which the individual actors of the story are placed. But then, Sir Walter Scott had also an intense sympathy with action, an eager interest in the unwinding of his own tales, which generally at least prevented his discursiveness from passing the boundaries of legitimate art. He never failed to give us a general background, a vista of tradition concerning the times of which he writes; but he seldom failed to make it a background to some much more vivid interest which fills the foreground in his own mind.

Perhaps George Eliot is to some extent deficient in this sympathy with action. She has obviously a great dislike to all those artificial enhancements of interest which do not arise fairly out of the moral constitutions of the characters; and this may have induced her sometimes to overlook the artistic value of a rapid current of action, of a certain shadow of suspense, as instruments in the exhibition of the deeper springs of human character. But if this indifference to the machinery of romance be a defect, it disappears in 'Adam Bede,' and is closely connected with its greatest beauties. In almost any other writer's hands the story of seduction which is at the basis of 'Adam Bede' would have been heightened by innumerable factitious elements, and the various threads of interest multiplied and interwoven at every point. George Eliot's natural aversion to these adventitious effects induced her to limit herself strictly to the simplest possible unfolding of the

tragedy; and the consequence is, that the story gains in moral spaciousness far more than it could have lost in exciting elements.

Nor is this clearness of the moral space, this free movement of personal character, a common characteristic of modern novels. There are two common errors into which even the greatest authors manage to fall, and by which they produce a suffocating effect in their pictures, and give the impression that their characters are, as Thackeray calls them, "puppets," with the strings pulled from behind. One error, the commonest in the greater modern artists, is to smother character in society, —to limit the whole scope of the delineation to the little effects which can be produced on a crowded canvas, where there is no room for even one mind to be itself, or to be seen apart from the rippling of social influences upon it. The other error, the commonest in writers of the older school, is to smother character in incident, to accumulate motives and external excitements so thickly, as to drown all spontaneous life in the artificial tension of passive emotion and involuntary impulse. One amongst several reasons why Scott's heroes and heroines are usually the poorest characters in his tales is, that they are made the centres of all these circumstantial interests, —the puppets arbitrarily moved about by these hidden strings. In neither case is there proper space for the free play of personal life. Real men of any force have a free sphere of their own, influenced, but in no way determined, by the social or circumstantial influences

which hem them round; and to encumber the principal characters with too great a pressure of subsidiary influences whether of one kind or another is almost inevitably to cramp the design and destroy the freedom of the life portrayed. Now there is nothing of all this in 'Adam Bede.' There is no such concentration of distracting influences as to bewilder any of the characters out of their natural responsibility for themselves and their own actions. No doubt a rural society, a certain community of life, is depicted; but while this is kept constantly present to one's mind by the fidelity with which all the mutual relations of the village society are impressed on the language and bearing of the characters delineated, yet each character stands out distinct and clear, holding its own destiny in its own power. This gives dignity, freedom, and simplicity to the whole, and adds a kind of solemnity to the movement of the principal action in the story, which, had it been complicated by any extraneous or chance elements, must have produced a less profound and single effect on the imagination.

Even in 'Adam Bede' there is an occasional looseness in the texture of the narrative which indicates the characteristic tendency of the author to sketch-in freely all her imagination has grasped, without reference to unity of design; but the intrinsic interest of the plot so far checks this tendency as to render it visible only when previously suggested by her other works. One sees it mainly in this, that some of the principal figures,

quite essential to the whole effect of the tale, stand too much outside the thread of the story, and take no part in its evolution. In Goethe's novels this fault reaches its climax; for no one has any reason to suppose, merely because a figure appears there, and is very carefully painted in, that it is to be connected in any way with the unwinding of the tale. George Eliot is not chargeable with any fault so great as this; but, apart from any disposition to uphold mere technical or formal rules of art, there is a greater vividness of impression, a more concentrated effect produced on the mind, when the course of the narrative works *in conjunction* with the power of the artist to engrave the picture upon the memory, than when they work apart. Seth Bede, for instance, one of the best conceptions in the story, is almost entirely a spectator of its course; one might remember the whole essence of the plot, and almost forget his existence,—and yet he is not a mere side-sketch, like Bartle Massey or Mr. Craig, for his character is essential to bring out in full relief the characters of Adam and of Dinah. Even in this tale, then, the group of characters painted is a far more perfect work of art than the story, taken as a whole, which includes them; for only one or two are strongly impressed on the mind by virtue of their close connection with the action of the narrative; the images of the remainder, graphically as they are rendered, are conveyed to the reader mainly through dialogue and description:

But, this once admitted, there is no further qualification to make in one's admiration of the art of the story. The group of characters, conceived in themselves, and without reference to the narrative, seems to me perfect,—a rural cartoon of marvellous simplicity, and yet stately in its beauty. The strong-headed, manly, sharp-tempered, secular carpenter, with his energetic satisfaction in work, his impatience of dreamers, and his early passion for Hetty's earthly loveliness,—the tender-hearted, mystic-minded Seth, who so readily unlooses his hold of his one dream of happiness,—the pretty, vain, little, pleasure-loving dairymaid, with her inarticulate love of luxury and dread of shame, so shallow that she cannot even feel a passing anticipation of the fate before her, but flutters into it like a moth into the candle,—the spiritual, transparent-minded, meditative, yet clear-sighted Wesleyan factory-girl, whose delicate sensitiveness to the inward condition and wants of others never ruffles her own distinct apprehension of the personal duty before her,—the good-natured, self-deceiving, weak young squire, with his patronising generosity, and his disposition to comfort himself, in his self-reproach, with the good opinion of those who are totally ignorant of his grounds for self-reproach,—and the noble, easy-minded, tolerant rector who feels so little impulse to exert moral influence over others that the Wesleyan factory-girl is a problem to him, and who, even where he has natural authority, rather shrinks from the intrusion necessary to exert it,—with the many other vividly-painted figures

more or less in the background,—the quick-witted, fretful Lisbeth, with her excessive fondness for the son she fears, and her half-contempt for the son whose religiousness she regards as an insurance to the family, —the more quick-witted and more audacious farmer's wife, whose reverence for the piety of her niece is so strongly mixed with dislike of eccentricity and dissent; —these, with the slighter but equally true outlines with which the picture is filled up, form one of the truest and most typical groups of English life I have ever seen delineated.

Moreover, the characters themselves are not more perfectly handled than the scene. It is impossible to forget where we are for a moment. The hum of village-life is heard throughout; the paramount influence of the manor-house, the substantial importance of the well-to-do farmer, the rector's authority in the parish,—are all conveyed without any effort through the force with which the author realises her scenes; and frequently we have a picture of idyllic beauty—as where Adam Bede finds Hetty picking currants in the garden—that reminds us of the soft poetic touch with which Goethe delineated a situation that had sunk deep into his mind.

The greatest effort and greatest success of the book consist, however, in the wonderful power of the contrast between Hetty and Dinah. From the first introduction of Dinah preaching to the crowd on the village green, and winning her little success over the vain heart of the

blacksmith's daughter, and the first appearance of Hetty tossing her butter in the dairy, full of conscious delight at *her* little success in riveting Captain Donnithorne's admiration, the interest centres in these two figures. What common measure of human nature can apply to them both? Near as they are in position, and equal in attractions, and belonging alike to the same half-educated class, they represent evidently the highest and lowest grade in the scale of spiritual nature, and the thoughts that fill the mind of the one do not even rouse the faintest echo in the nature of the other. The art of the contrast is the greater that it is never forced on our attention, and never exaggerated. Yet from the first it is growing upon us. Dinah's gentle rejection of the one brother whom she cannot love, opens the tale, while Hetty's conduct to the other whom she cannot love, forms its climax of interest. The interest is the deeper and truer that it is not the commonplace antithesis between right and wrong, but between the finest and most delicate of spiritual consciences, and that absolute inaccessibility to moral or spiritual thought which marks a soft, shallow, pleasure-loving nature pre-occupied with self-love. The moral *material* of which the two girls are made seems chargeable with the difference rather than any conduct of their own. Can any meeting-point be found between the two? or, if not, any experience, however strange, which shall bridge the apparently impassable gulf? This is in great measure the theme of the story; and the scene in which it is first fully

realised,—where Dinah and Hetty are pictured in the adjoining bed-rooms, each in their separate world,—is one of the most powerful pieces of imaginative writing which the present generation has produced. I can but extract the closing passage :—

"What a strange contrast the two figures made! Visible enough in that mingled twilight and moonlight. Hetty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening from her imaginary drama, her beautiful neck and arms bare, her hair hanging in a curly tangle down her back, and the baubles in her ears. Dinah, covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love. They were nearly of the same height; Dinah evidently a little the taller as she put her arm round Hetty's waist, and kissed her forehead.

"'I knew you were not in bed, my dear,' she said, in her sweet clear voice, which was irritating to Hetty, mingling with her own peevish vexation like music with jangling chains, 'for I heard you moving; and I longed to speak to you again to-night, for it is the last but one that I shall be here, and we don't know what may happen to-morrow to keep us apart. Shall I sit down with you while you do up your hair?' 'O yes,' said Hetty, hastily turning round and reaching the second chair in the room, glad that Dinah looked as if she did not notice her earrings.

"Dinah sat down, and Hetty began to brush together her hair before twisting it up, doing it with that air of excessive indifference which belongs to confused self-consciousness. But the expression of Dinah's eyes gradually relieved her; they seemed unobservant of all details. 'Dear Hetty,' she said, 'it has been borne in upon my mind to-night that you may some day be in trouble—trouble is appointed for us all here below, and there comes a time when we need more comfort and help than the things of this life can give. I want to tell you that if ever you are in trouble and need a friend that will always feel for you and love you, you have got that friend in Dinah Morris at Snowfield; and if you come to her, or send for her, she'll never forget this night, and the words she is speaking to you

now. Will you remember it, Hetty?' 'Yes,' said Hetty, rather frightened. 'But why should you think I shall be in trouble? Do you know of any thing?' Hetty had seated herself as she tied on her cap, and now Dinah leaned forwards and took her hands as she answered,

"'Because, dear, trouble comes to us all in this life: we set our hearts on things which it isn't God's will for us to have, and then we go sorrowing; the people we love are taken from us, and we can joy in nothing because they are not with us; sickness comes, and we faint under the burden of our feeble bodies; we go astray and do wrong, and bring ourselves into trouble with our fellow-men. There is no man or woman born into this world to whom some of these trials do not fall, and so I feel that some of them must happen to you; and I desire for you, that while you are young you should seek for strength from your Heavenly Father, that you may have a support which will not fail you in the evil day.'

"Dinah paused and released Hetty's hands, that she might not hinder her. Hetty sat quite still: she felt no response within herself to Dinah's anxious affection; but Dinah's words, uttered with solemn, pathetic distinctness, affected her with a chill fear. Her flush had died away almost to paleness; she had the timidity of a luxurious pleasure-seeking nature, which shrinks from the hint of pain. Dinah saw the effect, and her tender anxious pleading became the more earnest, till Hetty, full of a vague fear that something evil was sometime to befall her, began to cry. . . . . Dinah had never seen Hetty affected in this way before, and with her usual benignant hopefulness, she trusted it was the stirring of a divine impulse. She kissed the sobbing thing, and began to cry with her for grateful joy. But Hetty was simply in that excitable state of mind in which there is no calculating what turn the feelings may take from one moment to another, and for the first time she became irritated under Dinah's caress. She pushed her away impatiently, and said with a childish sobbing voice, 'Don't talk to me so, Dinah. Why do you come to frighten me? I've never done any thing to you. Why can't you let me be?'

"Poor Dinah felt a pang. She was too wise to persist, and only said mildly, 'Yes, my dear, you're tired; I won't hinder you any longer. Make haste and get into bed. Good-night.' She went out

of the room almost as quietly and quickly as if she had been a ghost; but once by the side of her own bed, she threw herself on her knees, and poured out in deep silence all the passionate pity that filled her heart. As for Hetty, she was soon in the wood again —her waking dreams being merged in a sleeping life scarcely more fragmentary and confused."

This is powerful, and it seems scarcely possible that the conception of a problem so deep should be worked out with any adequate success; and yet the development is as powerful as the commencement, and the solution most powerful of all. To depict the sufferings of a sensitive but frail nature,—the remorse of guilt, the despair of shame,—this would be comparatively easy to an imagination so powerful as George Eliot's. But to deal with a nature too shallow for any real sense of guilt, too easily numbed by pain for clear thought at all, too cowardly for despair,—and to show how, by the slow, dull pressure of mingled shame and hardship, momentarily broken by a new instinct, and then renewed after a more conscious act of guilt, a dim sense of spiritual things is literally *wrung* out of this sterile little pleasure-loving life, till under Dinah's kindly influence it becomes a distinct cry for help,—this is a task as great as any which an imaginative writer below the rank of a great poet ever attempted. Observe with what flexibility the author contracts her own powerful imagination within the limits of Hetty's nature, and delineates the growing wretchedness and numbness of her vacant mind during the futile journey in search of Captain Donnithorne, the helpless attempt to destroy herself, and the

violent shrinking of her whole being from the brink of death.

"The horror of this cold, and darkness, and solitude—out of all human reach—became greater every long minute: it was almost as if she were dead already, and knew that she was dead and longed to get back to life again. But no: she was alive still; she had not taken the dreadful leap. She felt a strange contradictory wretchedness and exultation; wretchedness, that she did not dare to face death; exultation, that she was still in life—that she might yet know light and warmth again. She walked backwards and forwards to warm herself, beginning to discern something of the objects around her, as her eyes became accustomed to the night: the darker line of the hedge, the rapid motion of some living creature—perhaps a field-mouse—rushing across the grass. She no longer felt as if the darkness hedged her in: she thought she could walk back across the field, and get over the stile; and then, in the very next field, she thought she remembered there was a hovel of furze near a sheepfold. . . . . .

"She had found the shelter: she groped her way, touching the prickly gorse, to the door, and pushed it open. It was an ill-smelling close place, but warm, and there was straw on the ground: Hetty sank down on the straw with a sense of escape. Tears came—she had never shed tears before since she left Windsor—tears and sobs of hysterical joy that she had still hold of life, that she was still on the familiar earth, with the sheep near her. The very consciousness of her own limbs was a delight to her: she turned up her sleeves, and kissed her arms with the passionate love of life."

Seldom has any human experience been more powerfully painted, and yet the confession in prison which Dinah at last wins from her is still more powerful. In short, the whole thread of inward history which unites the first interview between them in Hetty's bedroom with the last in her cell, is recounted with a power quite

unsurpassed in fiction. With no more promising instrument to work upon than the most sterile and frivolous of characters, George Eliot has brought forth tones which are far more pathetic than could have been extorted from a nobler type of suffering and penitence, for they seem to attest more solemnly the capacities of all men—of man. The spiritual and the earthly natures find at last a single meeting-point in the infantine cry for divine mercy which poor little Hetty puts forth to Dinah rather than to God.

The artistic conditions under which George Eliot works are, when she chooses, singularly favourable to the exhibition of the only kind of "moral" which a genuine artist should admit. No one now ever thinks of assuming that a writer of fiction lies under any obligation to dispose of his characters exactly as he would perhaps feel inclined to do, if he could determine for them the circumstances of a real instead of an imaginary life. It was a quaint idea of the last generation to suppose that the moral tendency of a tale lay, not in discriminating evil and good, but in the zeal which induced the novelist to provide, before the end of the third volume, for plucking up and burning the tares. But though we have got over that notion, our modern satirists are leading us into the opposite extreme, and trying to convince us that even discrimination itself, in such deep matters, is nearly impossible. The author of the 'Mill on the Floss' is hardly exempt from this tendency; but in 'Adam Bede' it is not discernible.

The only moral in a fictitious story which can properly be demanded of writers of genius is,—*not* to shape their tale this way or that, which they may justly decline to do on artistic grounds,—but to discriminate clearly the relative nobility of the characters they do conceive; in other words, to give us light enough in their pictures to let it be clearly seen where the shadows are intended to lie. An artist who leaves it doubtful whether he recognises the distinction between good and evil at all, or who detects in all his characters so much evil that the readers' sympathies must either be entirely passive or side with what is evil, is blind to artistic as well as moral laws. To banish confusion from a picture is the first duty of the artist; and confusion must exist where those lines which are the most essential of all for determining the configuration of human character are invisible or indistinctly drawn. Moreover, I think it may be said, that in painting human nature an artist is bound to give due weight to the motives which would claim authority over him in other acts of his life; and as he would be bound at any time and in any place to do any thing in his power to make clear the relation between good and evil, the same motive ought to induce him never to omit in his drawing to put in a light or a shadow which would add to the moral truthfulness of the picture.

But this conceded, an artist must still work according to the conditions of his own genius, and where that genius leads him only to give lively sketches, such as

Miss Austen's for example, of the social externals of character, and barely to indicate the interior forces which determine its form and growth, it is unreasonable to expect more than a very superficial moral. Those stories alone can have deep morals which are concerned with the deepest moral phenomena; but where this is so they must show them in their true light. 'Adam Bede' may be said to produce in this sense a deeper and nobler moral impression than any other English story of our day. It exhibits in close mutual relations characters of very various degrees of moral depth. It teaches us to discriminate truly between them. It has for its centre-piece one singularly beautiful and bright character which illuminates the whole narrative, and so aids us to realise the good and the evil in all the others; and hence every conscience as well as every imagination gains fresh force and distincter vision from its perusal.

The 'Mill on the Floss' is in every way inferior, in some respects painfully inferior, to 'Adam Bede.' It is a masterly fragment of fictitious biography in two volumes, followed by a second-rate one-volume novel,—the three connected into a single whole by very inadequate links. The deeper characters in the tale are not nearly so deep as those in 'Adam Bede;' and the shallower characters do not serve in the same way to bring into relief the nobler characteristics of the deeper. The moral foundations of the story are almost entirely laid on the same dreary level. Moral and spiritual *perspective* there is almost none. The one character

which is intended to give depth to and light up the tale at one time threatens to go out in smoke; and the shadows are anything but clear. There is occasional confusion, both artistic and moral, some exaggeration, and, I think, in the mere physiological attraction felt by the heroine for Stephen Guest, and all but yielded to, there is a serious artistic and moral blot.

Yet 'The Mill on the Floss' is a book of great genius. Its overflowing humour would alone class its author high among the humorists, and there are some sketches in it of English country life which have all the vivacity and not a little of the power of Sir Walter Scott's best works. The proud, warm-hearted, not very clear-headed miller, whose heart is broken by bankruptcy, and whose spirit is consumed with the thirst for revenge, is a character to live in the imagination. Yet 'The Mill on the Floss' is so inferior in art to George Eliot's really greatest works that I may pass it by to speak of what is in some respects her greatest achievement, 'Romola.'

George Eliot's drawings, as I have before said, all require a certain space, like Raffael's cartoons, and are not of that kind which produce their effect by the reiteration of scenes each complete in itself. You have to unroll a large surface of the picture before even the smallest *unit* of its effect is attained. And this is far more true of 'Romola' than of her English tales. In the latter, the constant and striking delineation of social features with which we are all familiar, satisfies the mind in the detail almost as much as in the complete

whole. This cannot be so when even greater power is shown in mastering the life of a foreign nation in a past age. We do not care about the light Florentine buzz with which so great a part of the first volume is filled. Its allusions are half riddles, and its liveliness a blank to us. Small local colours depend for their charm on the familiarity of small local knowledge. Then, again, George Eliot is much greater as an imaginative painter of character than as an imaginative painter of action, and naturally much more inclined for the one than the other. What her characters *do* is always subordinate with her to what they *are*. This is the highest artistic power, but it carries its inconveniences with it. She does not carry her readers *away*, as it is called: it is generally easy to stop reading her; she satisfies you for the moment, and does not make you look forward to the end. She has Sir Walter Scott's art for revivifying the past,—but not Scott's dynamical force in making you plunge into it with as headlong an interest as into the present. For this she compensates by a deeper and wider intellectual grasp,—but still it is easy enough to understand why half-developed characters, sketched in with unfamiliar local colours on a background of history that has long melted away, should look strange and uninviting especially when not carried off by any exciting current of events, to the ordinary reader's eye. It is marvellous that, in spite of these disadvantages, the wide and calm imaginative power of the writer should have produced a work which is likely to be permanently celebrated in

English literature,—in which Italy and England may feel a common pride.

The great artistic purpose of the story is to trace out the conflict between liberal culture and a most passionate form of Christian faith in that strange era (which has so many points of resemblance with the present), when the two in their most characteristic forms struggled for pre-eminence over Florentines who had been educated into the half-pedantic and half-idealistic scholarship of Lorenzo de Medici,—who faintly shared the new scientific impulses of the age of Columbus and Copernicus,—and whose hearts and consciences were stirred by the preaching, political as well as spiritual, of one of the very greatest as well as earliest of the reformers, the Dominican friar Savonarola. No period could be found when mingling faith and culture effervesced with more curious results. In some great and noble minds the new Learning, clearing away the petty rubbish of medieval superstition, and revealing the severe simplicities of the great age of Greece, grew into a feeling that supplied all the stimulus of fever, if not the rest of faith, and of these the author has drawn a very fine picture in the blind Florentine scholar, Romola's father, Bardo, who, with a restless fire in his heart, "hung over the books and lived with the shadows" all his life. Nothing is more striking and masterly in the story than the subtle skill with which the dominant influence of this scholarship over the imagination of the elder generation of that time —the generation which saw the first revival of learning—

is delineated in the pictures of Bardo and Baldassarre. In the former you get something like a glimpse of the stately passion for learning, which, in a later age (though England was then naturally behind Italy), took so vital a hold of the intellect of Milton, and overlaid his powerful imagination with all its rich fretwork of elaborate classical allusion. In the latter character, Baldassarre, the same impression is conveyed in a still more subtle and striking form, because by painting the intermittent flashes of intellectual power in a scholar's failing memory, and its alternations with an almost animal passion of revenge, we gain not only a more distinct knowledge of the relative value in which scholarship was there and then held as compared with other human attainments, but a novel sense of sympathy, which, in an age of diffused culture like this, it is not very easy to attain, with the extravagance, as we should now think, of the price set upon it. There are few passages of subtler literary grandeur in English romance than that which paints the electrifying effect of a thrill of vindictive passion on Baldassarre's paralysed memory, in recalling once more his full command of Greek learning, and the sense of power which thus returned to him :—

"He leaned to take up the fragments of the dagger; then he turned towards the book which lay open at his side. It was a fine large manuscript, an old volume of Pausanias. The moonlight was upon it, and he could see the large letters at the head of the page:

ΜΕΣΣΗΝΙΚΑ. ΚΒ'.

In old days he had known Pausanias familiarly; yet an hour or two ago he had been looking hopelessly at that page, and it had sug-

gested no more meaning to him than if the letters had been black weather-marks on a wall; but at this moment they were once more the magic signs that conjure up a world. That moonbeam falling on the letters had raised Messenia before him, and its struggle against the Spartan oppression. He snatched up the book, but the light was too pale for him to read further by. No matter; he knew that chapter; he read inwardly. He saw the stoning of the traitor Aristocrates—stoned by a whole people, who cast him out from their borders to lie unburied, and set up a pillar with verses upon it, telling how Time had brought home justice to the unjust. The words arose within him, and stirred innumerable vibrations of memory. He forgot that he was old: he could almost have shouted. The light was come again, mother of knowledge and joy! In that exultation his limbs recovered their strength: he started up with his broken dagger and book, and went out under the broad moonlight. It was a nipping frosty air, but Baldassarre could feel no chill—he only felt the glow of conscious power. He walked about and paused on all the open spots of that high ground, and looked down on the domed and towered city, sleeping darkly under its sleeping guardians, the mountains; on the pale gleam of the river; on the valley vanishing towards the peaks of snow: and felt himself master of them all. That sense of mental empire which belongs to us all in moments of exceptional clearness, was intensified for him by the long days and nights in which memory had been little more than the consciousness of something gone. That city, which had been a weary labyrinth, was material that he could subdue to his purposes now: his mind glanced through its affairs with flashing conjecture; he was once more a man who knew cities, whose sense of vision was instructed with large experience, and who felt the keen delight of holding all things in the grasp of language. Names! Images!—his mind rushed through its wealth without pausing, like one who enters on a great inheritance."

This passage, taken with those which lead up to it, whether they refer to Bardo or Baldassarre, has the effect of reproducing one great feature in the age of the revival of learning with the finest effect—that sense of large *human* power which the mastery over a great ancient

language, itself the key to a magnificent literature, gave, and which made scholarship then a *passion*, while with us it has almost relapsed into an antiquarian dry-as-dust pursuit.

We realise again, in reading about Bardo and Baldassarre, how, for these times, the first sentence of St. John, "In the beginning was the Word," had regained all its force,—to the exclusion, perhaps, of the further assertion that the Word was with God and was God. Man's sense of the great *power* of language, of which we have now so little, which, indeed, it is the tendency of the present day to depreciate, was in that day full of a new vigour; and to some extent contested with the mysteries of the Gospel the control of great men's souls.

This is the picture which *Romola* makes so living for us. We find here the strife between the keen definite knowledge of the reviving Greek learning, and the turbid visionary mysticism of the reviving Dominican piety. We find a younger generation, represented by Romola, and Dino, and Tito, that has inherited this scholarship, and finds it wholly inadequate for its wants, looking upon that almost as dry bones, which the older generation felt to be stimulating nourishment,—and either turning from it, like Dino, to the rapture of mystical asceticism, or using it, like Tito, as a useful sharp-edged tool in the battle of Florentine politics, or trying, like Romola, to turn it to its true purpose, viz., that of clarifying and sifting the false from the true elements in the great mysterious faith presented to her conscience by Savon-

arola. The pride of laborious farseeing scholarship, gazing with clear scornful eyes at the inarticulate convulsive esctasies of faith,—all the powers of language rebelling passionately, as it were, against the deep and fervent passions which transcend the containing powers of language, and boil over its edges, in religious, or even in the opposite animal raptures,—this is a picture wonderfully painted, and which produces all the more impression, that the minute vivid ripple of the light gossip of the Florentine market-place gives a ground-tone to the book.

This fundamental conflict between the Greek scholarship and the mystical Christian faith which runs through the book, is made even more striking by the treacherous character of the man who represents the Greek culture cut adrift from all vestige of moral or religious faith. The fine gradations of social dissimulation, so characteristic of Florence in the Medicean era, ranging from the single politic insincerity of Savonarola, which raises so grand a struggle in his mind, down to the easy-sliding treachery of Tito, bring up before us in another shape the characteristic contrasts of that day between that earnest spirit which revived the old culture because it was *truer* than the degraded current superstitions,—that pliant worldliness which adopted, and adapted itself to it, because it was an instrument of finer edge and wider utility,—and lastly, that fervent faith which despised it as substituting the study of a dead past for the great conflict of a living present. Tito's smooth dissimulation

is all the more striking a picture, because it comes out as the natural fruit of a mind almost incapable of either strong conviction or strong personal fidelity, gliding about in an age when strong convictions were coming to the birth, and among a race barely redeemed from a spirit of political falsehood (which was just going to be called Machiavellian) by a proud sense of loyalty to personal and party ties.

Tito is pictured, as the Greeks of that time perhaps deserved to be pictured, not as originally false, but as naturally pleasure-loving, and swerving aside before every unpleasant obstacle in the straight path, at the instance of a quick intelligence and a keen dislike both to personal collisions and to personal sacrifices. His character is, to use a mathematical term, the osculating curve which touches that of each of the others at the surface and nowhere else—Savonarola's at the point of his external political policy, Romola's in her love of beauty and hatred of the turbid malarious exhalations of visionary excitement, and the scholarly enthusiasm of Bardo only in the apt classical knowledge, by no means in the ardour of his love for it. On Tito's very first entrance on to the stage, the Florentine artist of the story, Piero di Cosimo, is eager to paint him as a Sinon, not that there is treachery in his face, but that there is in it the softness and suppleness and gliding ease of movement, and nimbleness of intellect, which in a time of political passion, seem likely to lead to treachery, because, first, they qualify both intellectually and morally, for the

traitor's part, and, next, they serve to mask his play. From this first scene, when the fatal ease of the man's manner is first suggested, to the noble scene at the conclusion, in which he sounds, and sounds successfully, Savonarola's too eager statesmanship, with intent to betray him to the Duke of Milan and the Pope, you see Tito's character grow into the foulest treachery, simply from its consistent desire to compass every pleasant end which suggests itself to him as feasible, without openly facing if he can help it, any one's severe displeasure.

Nor is anything drawn more finely than the peculiar species of fear which is an essential part of this character, a fear which, in the last resort, spurs the keen intellect of the man into a certain desperate energy, but which usually remains too cowardly even to understand itself, and lurks on in the character as a kind of unconscious resentment against those who wring from him the exercise of such an energy. A character essentially treacherous only because it is full of soft *fluid* selfishness is one of the most difficult to paint. But whether when locking up the crucifix, which Romola received from her dying brother's hands, in the little temple crowned with the figures of Ariadne and Bacchus, and fondly calling her "Regina mia," which somehow conveys that he less *loves* the woman than passionately admires her,—or buying his "garment of fear," the coat of light chain armour, from the armour-smith,—or thoughtlessly deceiving the poor little contadina Tessa by the mock marriage at the carnival,—or shrinking before Romola's indignation into

that frigid tone of empty affectionateness which is the clearest sign of a contracted heart,—or interpreting the Latin proclamation to the people with a veil of good-nature over his treacherous purpose,—or crowned in the feast at the Rucellai Gardens, and paling suddenly beneath Baldassarre's vindictive glance,—or petting Tessa and her children in his hiding-place on the hill,—the same wonderful power is maintained throughout, of stamping on our imagination with the full force of a master hand a character which seems naturally too fluent for the artist's purpose. There is not a more masterly piece of painting in English romance than this figure of Tito.

Of Romola it is less easy to say whether one is absolutely satisfied or not. The *soupçon* of hardness of which one is conscious as somewhat detracting from her power, the skill with which the author has prepared us for a mental struggle exactly similar, even in its minutest features, to what might occur to-day between the claims of a sublime faith appealing to the conscience, and a distaste for miracle or vision in its prophet, the striking contrast with Tessa, the ignorant "pretty little pigeon," who thinks every one who is kind to her a saint,—all render it a little difficult to say whether we know her intimately, or whether we have only a very artistic idea of what she is *not*, and what she *is* only by inference and contrast. My own feeling is that Romola is the least perfect figure in the book, though a fine one,—that she is a shade more modernized than the others, several shades

less individual, and, after all, though the pivot of her character turns, as it were, on faith, that she does not distinctly show any faith except the faith in rigid honour, in human pity, and partially also in Savonarola's personal greatness and power. I do not say the character is not natural,—I only say it is half-revealed and more suggested than fully painted, though these harder feminine characters always seem to ask to be outlined more strongly than any others.

But the great and concentrated interest of the book—at least, after the wonderful development of Tito's character—is the portrait of Savonarola, which it is almost impossible not to feel as faithful as history as it is great as romance. You see the same large human-hearted Italian Luther, narrower than Luther on some sides, owing to the thin Medicean culture against which he led the reaction, but with a far more statesmanlike and political purpose, and far more fiery imagination, the same, in fact, whom Mr. Maurice has intellectually delineated with so much delicate fidelity in his history of modern philosophy, and who paints himself in almost everything he wrote, but who yet was never before presented clearly to the eye. This portrait evinces almost as graphic a power, and far more scrupulous care than Sir Walter Scott used in those pictures of the various Stewarts which will certainly outlive in fame the very different originals. Nothing can be finer and more impressive—nothing more difficult to make fine and impressive—than Savonarola's exhortation to Romola to return to the

home from which she was flying. You see in every word the man's profound trust in God, as the author of all human ties and of all social and political ties, breaking through the fetters of his Dominican order, and asserting the divine order *in* Nature rather than the divine order *out of* Nature. [illegible]

This, however, is not the finest picture given of him. The finest is contained in the profoundly pathetic scene in which Savonarola, having in the fervour of his eloquence committed God to working him a miracle at the right moment, is brought to book both by his enemies and friends on the question of the trial by fire, and kneels in prayer that in fact refuses to be prayer, but rises into a political debate within himself as to the policy of seeming to take a step which he knows he must somehow evade. "While his lips were uttering audibly *cor mundum crea in me*, his mind was still filled with the images of the snare his enemies had prepared for him, still busy with the arguments by which he could justify himself against their taunts and accusations". But the scene is too long and too fine to spoil by snatching it from the context, and is, indeed, closely bound up with the noble picture of the encounter with Tito which follows. Our author rejects apparently the authenticity of the last great words attributed to Savonarola as he is dying on the scaffold, which Mr. Maurice accepts. "The voice of the Papal emissary," says the historian of philosophy, "was heard proclaiming that Savonarola was cut off from the Church militant and triumphant. Another voice was heard say-

ing, 'No, not from the Church triumphant, they cannot shut me out of that.'" It is a pity that George Eliot rejects, as I suppose she does, the evidence for these words. They would have formed a far higher artistic ending to her story than the somewhat feeble and womanish chapter with which it concludes,—the only blot on the book. Large and genial as is George Eliot's sympathy with Savonarola, she has, I suppose, no wish to represent his faith as altogether triumphant. Yet Romola's faith in goodness and self-sacrifice, and in little children and "the eternal marriage of love and duty," and so forth, which the proem tells us is ever to last, would be an idle dream for the world, without a Christ in whose eternal nature all these realities live and grow. 'Felix Holt' contains so little new illustration of George Eliot's genius beyond the fragments of poetry which first taught most of us to understand the poetic side of her imagination, that I will pass it by to speak of her two poems, 'The Spanish Gipsy' and 'The Legend of Jubal,' which last might, I think, have been more fitly termed a hymn in praise of death. 'The Spanish Gipsy,' with all its rich colour, and sometimes almost Miltonic stateliness, shows, I think, that George Eliot is far greater as a poet when she interprets freely the poetry of real life in her novels and romances, than when she submits her imagination to the chains of verse. Verse to her is a fetter, and not a stimulus. In prose she is so free and dramatic that it is a disappointment to find the characters in her 'Spanish Gipsy' moving in obvious

obedience to the intellectual views which the reader at once discovers in relation with them. If I except, perhaps, —and even there I am doubtful,—the Spanish Duke, Don Silva, whose character is certainly finely conceived both in outline and in detail, though the general effect is, I think, a little like "the misty Hyades," a haze of moral worlds melting into each other,—the chief characters of the story, especially the Gipsy chief and the Gipsy heroine, do not leave upon me any impression of dramatic power at all comparable to the leading figures of George Eliot's greater prose works. 'Adam Bede' and 'Romola' remain much her greatest imaginative efforts, though there is, of course, ample opportunity in the mere form of *verse* for imaginative beauties of a kind inadmissible and unadmitted in her novels.

The intellectual background of the tragedy,—for tragedy, with interspersed narrative links, it really is,—seems to me the greatest thing about it, and it is very great; the figures which are painted in upon that background, and whose movements are intended to bring it out into relief, are, I think, hardly living and real enough to assert fully their own independent vitality. They betray the intellectual analysis to which they have been subjected, and to illustrate which they were probably created. If I may venture to interpret so great a writer's thought, I should say that the 'Spanish Gipsy' is written to illustrate not merely doubly and trebly, but from four or five distinct points of view, how the inheritance of the definite streams of impulse and tradition

stored up in what we call race, often puts a tragic veto upon any attempt of spontaneous individual emotion or volition to ignore or defy their control, and to emancipate itself from the tyranny of their disputable and apparently cruel rule.

You can see the influence of the recent Darwinian doctrines, so far as they are applicable at all to moral characteristics and causes, in almost every page of the poem. How the threads of hereditary capacity and hereditary sentiment control as with invisible cords the orbits of even the most powerful characters,—how the fracture of those threads, so far as it can be accomplished by mere *will*, may have even a greater effect in wrecking character than moral degeneracy would itself produce,—how the man who trusts and uses the hereditary forces which natural descent has bestowed upon him, becomes a might and a centre in the world, while the man, perhaps intrinsically the nobler, who dissipates his strength by trying to swim against the stream of his past, is neutralised and paralysed by the vain effort,—again, how a divided past, a past not really homogeneous, may weaken this kind of power, instead of strengthening it by the command of a larger experience,—all this George Eliot's poem paints with a tragical force that answers to Aristotle's fine definition of tragedy, that which "purifies" by pity and by fear.

The heroine of the book, an infant of gipsy birth, as she subsequently discovers, has been adopted by Duke Silva's mother, and when the poem opens the Duke is

planning their immediate marriage. The motto of the story might be given in some of Fedalma's, the heroine's last words :—

> "Our dear young love,—its breath was happiness!
> *But it had grown upon a larger life*
> *Which tore its roots asunder. We rebelled,—*
> *The larger life subdued us.*"

At the very opening of the poem the seeds of the constitutional difference of tendency between the free gipsy blood and the deeply furrowed Spanish pride and honour are beginning to flower. Though the love between the two is perfect, Fedalma frets against the restraints of the secluded Spanish grandeur, and yearns after a larger measure of popular sympathies. On a lovely southern evening she even dances on the Plaza, the public square of Bedmar, the garrison of which Duke Alva commands (for a Moorish force is in the neighbourhood),—and this she does from the mere yearning to express, after the Southern fashion, her spontaneous delight in the harmony of the evening, and her fulness of sympathy with the people who are looking on. This incident is the first made use of by the author to indicate the immense divergence between the inherited natures of the Gipsy and the Spanish Duke,—and this, though the difference is purely one of inheritance, for Fedalma has been brought up from her birth in the strict seclusion of a Spanish grandee. This is her excuse to her lover for the breach of conventional manners of which she has been guilty.

"Yes, it is true I was not wrong to dance;
The air was filled with music, with a song
That seemed the voice of the sweet eventide—
The glowing light entering through eye and ear—
That seemed our love—mine, yours—they are but one—
Trembling through all my limbs, as fervent words
Tremble within my soul and must be spoken.
And all the people felt a common joy
And shouted for the dance. A brightness soft
As of the angels moving down to see
Illumined the broad space. The joy, the life
Around within me were one heaven: I longed
To blend them visibly: I longed to dance
Before the people—be as mounting flame
To all that burned within them! Nay, I danced;
There was no longing: I but did the deed,
Being moved to do it."

And here is the finest study of character in the poem, the Spanish Duke, who has a love in him that overflows the channels of Spanish tradition and convention, and whose wreck of mind, due to the impulse which seizes him to break with those traditions rather than with his love, is the true theme of the tragedy:—

"A man of high-wrought strain, fastidious
In his acceptance, dreading all delight
That speedy dies and turns to carrion:
His senses much exacting, deep instilled
With keen imagination's difficult needs;—
Like strong-limbed monsters studded o'er with eyes,
Their hunger checked by overwhelming vision,
Or that fierce lion in symbolic dream,
Snatched from the ground by wings and new-endowed
With a man's thought-propelled relenting heart.
Silva was both the lion and the man;
First hesitating shrank, then fiercely sprang,

Or having sprung, turned pallid at his deed
And loosed the prize, paying his blood for naught.
A nature half-transformed, with qualities
That oft bewrayed each other, elements
Not blent but struggling, breeding strange effects,
Passing the reckoning of his friends or foes.
Haughty and generous, grave and passionate;
With tidal moments of devoutest awe,
Sinking anon to farthest ebb of doubt;
Deliberating ever, till the sting
Of a recurrent ardour made him rush
Right against reasons that himself had drilled
And marshalled painfully. A spirit framed
Too proudly special for obedience,
Too subtly pondering for mastery:
Born of a goddess with a mortal sire,
Heir of flesh-fettered, weak divinity,
Doom-gifted with long resonant consciousness
And perilous heightening of the sentient soul."

When Fedalma is claimed by her father the Zincalo (or Gipsy) chief, and called upon by him to break from her Spanish ties and aid him in the task he has set himself of forming his gipsy tribe into an independent nation on the shore of Africa, the struggle between the two natures,—the inherited deference to a captain and father of Zarca's free, bold, and commanding nature, and the acquired nature, the passion for her Spanish lover,—begins. But in Fedalma it only appears as a struggle which is from the first decided in favour of the stronger nature she has inherited. Her love to the Duke is true and inexhaustible; but she realises at once that to wrap herself up in the subtle tendernesses of her ducal lover, and leave her father to wrestle alone with his great

enterprise on a foreign shore, will make her utterly unworthy even of her own place in life, and so fill her with the conviction that she is mean, and selfish, and worthless; that she would not be worthy even of the part she would choose, and would sink in her own and Silva's esteem. So she goes with her father, broken-hearted but firm, and breaks away from Silva.

The Duke, on the other hand, tramples on the ties of rank, family, and country, for the sake of his love. He gives up his place as commander of the fortress to follow Fedalma, hoping to win her back to him. Finding the Gipsy chief firm, and his daughter inexorably resolved to sacrifice her love to what she thinks her duty, he sacrifices his own place in life altogether, and swears fealty to the Zincalo chief rather than lose his betrothed. In the mean time the latter has to earn his Moorish safe-conduct to Africa by taking the fortress of Eedmar, which Silva had commanded, and Silva finds, to his unutterable horror and remorse, that the fortress has been surprised and all his own dearest companions in arms slain by the troop of Zincali with whom he had united himself. In his insanity of remorse he kills Zarca, —Fedalma's father,—and the tragedy ends with their final separation: she to take, so far as she may, her father's place as ruler of the Gipsy people on the African shore; he to get absolved for his sin, and to recover his knightly name as a Spanish soldier of the Cross. The point of the tragedy, however, is the contrast between the moral strength of the Gipsy chief, Zarca

whose inherited qualities of mind and body and whole life had been absolutely in harmony, and the comparative weakness of his daughter, in whom Spanish training and Spanish ties had partly neutralised her gipsy blood, and, again, between both of these and the absolute wreck of character in Silva when he breaks with his whole ancestral traditions, and tries to make a sacrifice of them to love.

The same striking theme is illustrated from several other points of view. Silva's uncle, Father Isidor, the prior of San Domingo, the priest of the Spanish Inquisition, whose nature is all held within the deep-cut channels of Spanish tradition, within the ideas which dominated the Spanish chivalry and the Spanish faith, is the moral foil to his nephew. He stands out,—keen, hard, loyal to his own ideas, domineering without hesitation, and crushing without a scruple all even in himself which tends to divide himself,—as the model of the morality which acts rigidly and severely, volition and nature being in perfect unison, on a fixed and customary type.

But apart even from these leading characters, perpetually recurring touches throughout the whole poem show how entirely this theme had occupied George Eliot's imagination. Take but as one instance, this, on the inherited forces which form the characters of monkeys *à propos* of the juggler's ape :—

> "Man thinks
> Brutes have no wisdom, since they know not his :
> Can we divine their world?—the hidden life
> That mirrors us as hideous shapeless power,

> Cruel supremacy of sharp-edged death,
> Or fate that leaves a bleeding mother robbed?
> Oh, *they have long tradition and swift speech,*
> *Can tell with touches and sharp darting cries*
> *Whole histories of timid races taught*
> *To breathe in terror by red-handed man.*"

It is impossible, indeed, to speak too highly of the intellectual conception at the basis of the poem, and the finish and power with which it is worked out and adorned. Thus, how fine for its purpose is the scene between Don Silva and the Jewish astrologer, Sephardo, who perceives so clearly the scientific limits to astrological prediction, that he refines away and distinguishes till his science is but, as Silva tells him, to pinch

> "With confident selection these few grains
> And call them verity, from out the dust
> Of crumbling error."

This discussion between Silva and the Jewish astrologer on the decaying science of astral influence, and on those contingencies of human life which its clearest visions leave unsolved,—and again, this glimpse of a subtle scientific mind which, while it had lost confidence in the boasted power of the science, still clung cautiously to the dwindling grain of truth which it still believed that the science contained, are, as it were, poetical glosses and commentaries on the main theme of the story, showing how the past of Europe in that age of religious inquisition and scientific discovery was pressing upon the present, how much of it was crumbling away beneath the intellectual solvent of the new thought, and yet

how keenly the most vigilant and subtle minds of the age felt the danger of breaking,—even intellectually,—with the past, and how anxiously, as they cut away the superfluous traditions, they held to everything which had not yet been disproved.

This fading belief, like other fading beliefs, is intended to have its effect on Silva's mind, disposing him to distrust both the social and religious traditions in which he had been brought up, and therefore to trust more amply the passion of love in his heart which he knew to be both noble and true. Yet even from the first he, too, cannot keep his mind off the danger of the schism in his life which he feels approaching, and of which his mere love for a nature so untrammelled by tradition as Fedalma's cannot but warn him. How finely he says, in his first love scene with Fedalma :—

> " Ah, yes ! all preciousness
> To mortal hearts is guarded by a fear.
> All love fears loss, and most that loss supreme,
> Its own perfection—seeing, feeling, change
> From high to lower, dearer to less dear.
> Can love be careless ? If we lost our love,
> What should we find ?—with this sweet Past torn off,
> Our lives deep scarred just where their beauty lay ?
> The best we found thenceforth were still a worse :
> *The only better is a Past that lives*
> *On through an added Present, stretching still*
> *In hope unchecked by shaming memories*
> *To life's last breath.*"

While the intellectual ground-plan of the tragedy is exquisitely worked out, the characters are to me faint, misty, imperfectly executed,—and this applies especially

to the Gipsy chief and his daughter. The lyrics, too, though one or two are of great beauty, do not captivate me like the reflective poetry. It is a great meditative, not a great dramatic work,—its meditation inlaid, as all true meditation must be, with keen and clear observation. Of touches of fine humour of George Eliot's grave kind there are many. Of wise apophthegms there are still more, and of exquisitely tender sentiment and fancy as much as heart could wish. But as a poem it is, I think, less striking than the author's very characteristic and sad poem on 'The Legend of Jubal.' And as a work of imagination it certainly falls far below her greater prose works.

The subject of this latter poem, which I make no apology for analysing, not only as a work of art, but as a doctrinal work,—for so great a writer as George Eliot should be studied as a thinker as well as as a painter,—is praise of death, and of the fulness of energy which the dark inevitable fate that awaits us has lent to human life while it lasts. Cain is introduced flying from the wrath of God, and seeking some land where other and kinder gods ruled, and might remit the stern decree of death. He finds such a land as he supposes, and for hundreds of years his descendants grow up around him, without hearing of death, in glad idleness. In some of the sweetest lines of the poem we are told how

> "They laboured gently, as a maid who weaves
> Her hair in mimic mats, and pauses oft
> And strokes across her hand the tresses soft,

Then peeps to watch the poisèd butterfly
Or little burthened ants that homeward hie.
Time was but leisure to their lingering thought,
There was no need for haste to finish aught;
But sweet beginnings were repeated still
Like infant babblings that no task fulfil;
For love, that loved not change, constrained the simple will."

Into this world, unconscious of doom, the knowledge of death enters by the accidental death of one of Lamech's children, and Cain is compelled to disclose the fate which remains for all of them by that stern will of Jehovah, which he has hoped, but failed, to escape by his long pilgrimage:—

"And a new spirit from that hour came o'er
The race of Cain; soft idlesse was no more,
But even the sunshine had a heart of care,
Smiling with hidden dread,—a mother fair
Who folding to her breast a dying child
Beams with feigned joy that but makes sadness mild.
Death was now lord of life, and at his word
Time, vague as air before, new terrors stirred,
With measured wing now audibly arose
Throbbing through all things to some unseen close.
Now glad Content by clutching Haste was torn,
And Work grew eager and Device was born.
It seemed the light was never loved before.
Now each man said, 'Twill go and come no more.'
No budding branch, no pebble from the brook,
No form, no shadow, but new dearness took
From the one thought that life must have an end;
And the last parting now began to send
Diffusive dread through love and wedded bliss,
Thrilling them into finer tenderness.
Then Memory disclosed her face divine,
That like the calm nocturnal lights doth shine

Within the soul and shows the sacred graves,
And shows the presence that no sunlight craves,
No space, no warmth, but moves among them all;
Gone and yet here, and coming at each call,
With ready voice and eyes that understand,
And lips that ask a kiss, and dear responsive hand.
Thus to Cain's race Death was tear-watered seed
Of various life, and action-shaping need."

The vivifying effect of this knowledge of Death is described especially in relation to the three sons of Lamech,—Jabal, who teaches the dumb animals to love and obey him,—Tubal Cain, who founds the industrial arts,—Jubal, in whom the new sense of limitation breeds the spirit of poetry and music:—

"A yearning for some hidden soul of things,
Some outward touch complete on inner springs
That vaguely moving bred a lonely pain,—
A want that did but stronger grow with gain
Of all good else, as spirits might be sad
For lack of speech to tell us they are glad."

Jubal invents the lyre and the art of song, and receives unmeasured glory and gratitude from his kindred for his gift to them of the new faculty, till he grows weary of hearing the echo of his own words, and resolves to seek some distant land where he can find new harmonies and give up his heart to solitary raptures. He journeys on for ages, sowing music everywhere as he goes, till he reaches the sea, and finds himself so utterly unable to render again the music of that "mighty harmonist" that he touches his lyre no more, and longs again for the land where first he realized the power which is ebbing

away from him as his "heart widens with its widening home." He returns to find his name famous, and temples built in his praise; but also to find a generation which knows him not and which hardly notices the feeble old man who is the true claimant for these divine honours. Jubal feels a passionate desire to identify himself with the object of all this veneration. A germ of selfishness lurks in him still:—

> "What though his song should spread from man's small race
> Out through the myriad worlds that people space,
> And make the heavens one joy-diffusing quire?
> Still, 'mid that vast would throb the keen desire
> Of this poor aged flesh, this eventide,
> This twilight soon in darkness to subside,
> This little pulse of self that, having glowed
> Through thrice three centuries, and divinely strowed
> The light of music through the vague of sound,
> *Ached smallness still in good that had no bound.*"

In other words, the yearning to be personally recognized and identified as the giver of these great gifts to man was the poor alloy still left in Jubal's nature,—an alloy which the mere fear of death had, by the way, apparently *stimulated* rather than diminished; for George Eliot expressly tells us that Tubal-Cain at least, and still more, I should think, Jubal,

> . . . . "wot not of treachery,
> Or greedy lust, or any ill to be,
> Save the one ill of sinking into naught,
> Banished from action and act-shaping thought."

However, Death itself is to purify Jubal from this insatiable longing for personal recognition as the author

of that music and song which the fear of Death had generated in him; for Jubal's claim to be the inventor of the lyre is treated as a profanity, and he is beaten and driven away from the temple built in his honour, to die alone. Dying, a vision comes to him of the "angel of his life and death," who teaches him that his life had been full enough of blessing without his receiving in his own person the honour due to it,—that

> "in thy soul to bear
> The growth of song, and feel the sweet unrest
> Of the world's spring-tide in thy conscious breast,"

was itself the greatest of all gifts, far greater than any gratitude which might seem to be due to it. Indeed, it was the very intensity of the light he had radiated which caused his old age to be despised,—as a shrine too mean for a rumour so divine. Nay, it was the final blessing of Death,—so I understand the author to teach, —that, after stimulating such creative activity as Jubal's, it destroyed the "fleshly self" with all its egotisms, and left him only an impersonal immortality in that human gladness which, in its rejoicings, does *not* recognize the personal origin of its joys:—

> "This was thy lot, to feel, create, bestow,
> And that immeasurable life to know
> From which the fleshly self falls shrivelled, dead,
> A seed primeval that has forests bred.
> It is the glory of the heritage
> Thy life has left, that makes thy outcast age;
> Thy limbs shall lie, dark, tombless on this sod,
> Because thou shinest in man's soul a god,

> Who found and gave new passion and new joy,
> That naught but earth's destruction can destroy.
> Thy gifts to give was thine of men alone;
> 'Twas but in giving that thou could'st atone
> For too much wealth amid their poverty."

And with these warnings in his ears Jubal is left at the close of this grand but melancholy legend,

> "Quitting mortality, a quenched sun-wave,
> The All-creating Presence for his grave."

Whether the poetic form is or is not generally adequate to the thought, at all events the thought itself is gravely passionate, expressing a strange depth of gratitude for the power of Death to stimulate energy and give a new keenness of emotion to the race; and finally for Death's power to rob the individual soul of the one selfish husk which clings to all such energy, however disinterested, —the craving for personal recognition.

So I understand the teaching of this very fine legend, —and, in parts at least, fine poem,—though the deepest part of the teaching, the part of it most likely to strike the imagination and affect the heart of its readers, seems to me profoundly false. I have noted the apparent contradiction implied in praising Death for the stimulus it gives to the generally beneficent perhaps, but certainly egotistic desire for immortal fame, and yet praising it *also* for separating the shrivelled, dead husk of the "fleshly self" from the immeasurable life it has engendered in generations to come.

But there is a deeper vice still in the doctrine that

Death extinguishes that selfish egotism which, as George Eliot so finely says, "ached smallness still in good that has no bound." To extinguish the *power* of selfish feeling is *not* really a victory over selfish feeling; Jubal dies before he has gained any such victory. If he had gained the victory, there would have been no praise due to Death, by which he could not have gained it. To be willing to submit to annihilation for the infinite good of others might be a noble and disinterested attitude of mind, but then such willingness is not the gift of Death, but of Life, and he who has it can gain nothing by Death, while the universe loses by it the very flower of its life. The death of the corn of wheat which, "except it die, abideth alone, but if it die bringeth forth much fruit," is not the death of annihilation, but of transfiguration; and the transfiguration of the highest thing man can know, personal love, involves the retention and development of that highest element, the personality, not its degradation and extinction. If Jubal, instead of being quenched like "a sun-wave" in the "*grave*" of an "All-creating Presence,"—what a paradox is there!—had learnt to renounce the passionate desire to be identified with his own gift to mankind, he would have ceased to "ache smallness still in good that had no bound," in a far higher and truer sense than any in which that can be asserted of a "quenched sun-wave" which has ceased to be at all. The doctrine of this poem seems to me to come to this: either that Death creates by making us smart under the consciousness of

limitation, by stinging self-love into haste and energy, or, that purely disinterested creation—creation, without the thirst for personal recognition—is not for personal beings like men at all, but the privilege only of unconscious and impersonal life. But what we do actually experience, in however imperfect a degree cannot be *impossible* to us,—and the creative power of purely disinterested love has no fascination, indeed, strictly speaking, no *meaning*, for us, if we drop the thought of the personal centre from which it flows. "Love" implies the self-surrender of a conscious being to the well-being of others. An unconscious stream of beneficent energy is in no sense "love," and excites none of the moral awe which the display of any divine love excites.

Moreover, even the true and undeniable effect of death in stimulating energy, and making men, by suggesting loss, conscious of the love which otherwise they might hardly know, is more or less conditional on death's being believed to be *not* final. A man with death near at hand will seldom undertake any task unconnected with the life into which he believes himself about to plunge, because it seems hardly worth while. Those who lose their belief in immortality too often sink under the moral paralysis of a creed which seems to leave so little that it is worth while to attempt. Especially, the loss of faith in immortality usually saps the deepest and tenderest affections of human nature, instead of giving them, as George Eliot intimates, a new tenderness. It is clear that the apprehension of loss cannot *create*

feeling;—it can and does only bring home to the heart the depth of feeling already cherished there. But the belief in a final death does much more than this: it undermines our respect for the intrinsic worth of a nature so ephemeral, and makes it seem more reasonable,—perhaps I should say makes it *really* more reasonable,—to contract our love into better keeping with the short minutes during which alone it can be entertained.

I have analyzed this poem, and even criticized its doctrine at some length, because it is one of the few direct confessions of faith which the great critic I am criticising has put on record, though indications of similar views are freely scattered through her works; and it is impossible to understand so deep and so thoroughly intellectual a painter without knowing her deepest thoughts and measuring them to some extent by one's own. To me, indeed, George Eliot's scepticism seems one of the greatest of the limitations on her genius. One rises from the study of her works, profoundly impressed with their thoroughness, their depth, their rich colouring, their marvellous humour, their laborious conscientiousness, their noble ethical standard, *and* their weariness,—the weariness of a great speculative intellect which can find no true spring of elasticity, and in vain forces from herself a certain amount of enthusiasm for optimist views of that "wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world," from which Shelley makes Beatrice Cenci recoil in horror. The only flaw I can see in

George Eliot's intellect consists in her attempts to conform her mind cheerfully to facts against which she inwardly rebels. In 'The Mill on the Floss' she spoilt her story by endeavouring to paint the physiological attraction of a certain kind of animal character for a nature far above it, as if it were more nearly irresistible than in fact I think it is,—and, as far as I can see, only because she had arrived at a conviction that, as physiological attractions exert a great influence in human life, realists should put a certain amount of force on their own dislike to recognize them fully; and, in the poem I have just criticised, George Eliot seems to me to make an extraordinary blunder for so fine and subtle an intellect, in not recognizing clearly that Death, if it could really quench the *possibility* of selfish feeling, would in no way carry on and complete the triumph of true disinterestedness, but, on the contrary, would finally prevent that triumph. But, in truth, George Eliot was here making the best of a bad business,—trying to discover virtues in inevitable destiny because it is inevitable. It would have been more like her, I think, to admit at once that while the expectation of Death does actually stimulate finite and selfish men to energy, the hope by which it thus stimulates them is empty air, if Death be all it seems. The laborious enthusiasm in the 'Legend of Jubal' seems to me profound melancholy in disguise,—melancholy striving for a calm and serenity it does not feel.

George Eliot, with a faith like that of her own

'Dinah,' would, to my mind, be one of the greatest intellectual personages the world had ever seen. Her imagination would gain that vivacity and spring the absence of which is its only artistic defect; her noble ethical conceptions would win certainty and grandeur; her singularly just and impartial judgment would lose the tinge of gloom which now seems always to pervade it; and her poetic feelings would be no longer weighed down by the superincumbent mass of a body of sceptical thought with which they struggle for the mastery in vain. Few minds at once so speculative and so creative have ever put their mark on literature. If she cannot paint the glow of human enterprise like Scott, or sketch with the easy rapidity of Fielding, she can do what neither of them could do—see and explain the relation of the broadest and commonest life to the deepest springs of philosophy and science. With a quicker pulse of life, with a richer, happier faith, I hardly see the limit to her power.

VII.

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.[1]

THESE two volumes, as they now stand, contain as adequate a picture of the singular but large, simple, and tender nature of the Oxford poet as is attainable, and it is one which no one can study without much profit, and perhaps also some loss; without feeling the high exaltation of true poetry and the keen pleasure caused by the subtlety of true scholarship, at every turn; nor also without feeling now and again those "blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realized," which are scattered so liberally among these buoyant ardours, disappointed longings, and moods of speculative suspense, and which characterize these singular letters of reticent tenderness and rough self-satire.

[1] 'The Poems and Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough, with a Selection from his Letters, and a Memoir.' Edited by his wife. 2 vols. With a portrait. Macmillan.

Every one who knew Clough even slightly received the strongest impression of the unusual breadth and massiveness of his mind. Singularly simple and genial, he was unfortunately cast upon a self-questioning age, which led him to worry himself with constantly testing the veracity of his own emotions. He has delineated in four lines the impression which his habitual reluctance to converse on the deeper themes of life made upon those of his friends who were attracted by his frank simplicity. In one of his shorter poems he writes:—

> "I said my heart is all too soft;
> He who would climb and soar aloft
> Must needs keep ever at his soul
> The tonic of a wholesome pride."

This expresses the man in a very remarkable manner. He had a kind of proud simplicity about him, singularly attractive, and often singularly disappointing to those who longed to know him well. He had a fear, which many would think morbid, of leaning much on the approbation of the world; and there is one characteristic passage in his poems, in which he intimates that men who lean on the good opinion of others might even be benefited by a *crime* which would rob them of that evil stimulant:—

> "Why so is good no longer good, but crime
> Our truest best advantage; since it lifts us
> Out of the stifling gas of men's opinion
> Into the vital atmosphere of Truth,
> Where He again is visible, though in anger."

So eager was his craving for reality and perfect sincerity,

so morbid his dislike even for the unreal conventional forms of life, that a mind quite unique in simplicity and truthfulness represents itself in his poems as

> "Seeking in vain, in all my store,
> One feeling based on truth."

Indeed, he wanted to reach some guarantee for simplicity deeper than simplicity itself. I remember his principal criticism on America, after returning from his residence in Massachusetts, was that the New Englanders were much simpler than the English, and that this was the great charm of New England society. His own habits were of the same kind,—sometimes almost austere in their simplicity. Luxury he disliked, and sometimes his friends thought him even ascetic.

This almost morbid craving for a firm base on the absolute realities of life was very wearing in a mind so self-conscious as Clough's, and tended to paralyse the expression of a certainly great genius. As a rule, his lyrical poems fall short of complete success in delineating the mood which they are really meant to delineate, owing to this chronic state of introspective criticism on himself in which he is too apt to write, and which, characteristic as it is, necessarily diminishes the linearity and directness of the feeling expressed, refracting it, as it were, through media of very variable density. As he himself,—no doubt in this stanza delineating himself,—says of one of his heroes in "the Clergyman's first tale":—

> "With all his eager motions still there went
> A self-correcting and ascetic bent,

That from the obvious good still led astray,
And set him travelling on the longest way."

And in the same poem there are descriptive touches which very skilfully portray the nature of those dispersive influences, as I may call them, in his character, which, while they may injure his lyrical, add a great wealth of criticism to his speculative and disquisitional poems :—

"Beside the wishing-gate, which so they name
'Mid Northern hills, to me this fancy came ;
A wish I formed, my wish I thus expressed :
' Would I could wish my wishes all to rest,
And know to wish the wish that were the best!
Oh, for some winnowing wind to th' empty air
This chaff of easy sympathies to bear
Far off, and leave me of myself aware ! '"

That is clearly self-portraiture, and it describes an element in Clough's nature which, no doubt, contributed greatly to diminish the number of his few but exquisite lyrical poems, and sometimes to confine even those to the delineation of feelings of a certain vagueness of drift. Yet there was, besides this most subtle and almost over-perfect intellectual culture in Clough, much also of a boyish, half-formed nature in him, even to the last, which, when fully roused, contributed a great deal of the animation, and, when least roused, contributed not a little of the embarrassed, shy, half-articulate tone to some of the most critical passages of his finest poems. He describes this side of boyish feeling admirably in one of his 'In Mari Magno' tales :—

"How ill our boyhood understands
Incipient manhood's strong demands !

Boys have such trouble of their own
As none, they fancy, e'er have known,
Such as to speak of, or to tell
They hold were unendurable:
Religious, social, of all kinds,
That tear and agitate their minds.
A thousand thoughts within me stirred
Of which I could not speak a word;
Strange efforts after something new
Which I was wretched not to do;
Passions, ambitions, lay and lurked,
Wants, counter-wants, obscurely worked
Without their names, and unexplained."

And even in his latest and most finished poems you see the working of this half-developed element of Clough's massive and rich but to some extent inert imagination; and you see, too, how powerfully it operated to discontent him with his own productions, to make him underrate vastly their real worth. Rapidly as his genius ripened at an age when, with most men, the first flush of it would have passed over, there was something of conscious inertia, not unlike immaturity, in it to the last, which gives a tone of proud hesitation, a slowness of hand, to the literary style of his finest poems. He calls himself, in his 'Long Vacation Pastoral,' "the grave man, nicknamed Adam," and there is really something of the flavour of primeval earth, of its unready vigour and crude laboriousness, about his literary nature. Even when he succeeds best, the reader seems to see him "wipe his honourable brows bedewed with toil." And yet he is impatient with himself for not succeeding better, and despises his own work.

The 'Long Vacation Pastoral' belongs to a class of poems that is scarcely naturalized in England—the class of which Goethe's 'Hermann and Dorothea' is perhaps the most perfect specimen, though in vigour and breadth of imagination Clough's pastoral is certainly not inferior. Goethe's influence over the school of poetry of which Matthew Arnold and Clough have been the most considerable English disciples, is very powerfully marked. There is the same longing after the old Homeric simplicity,—less successful perhaps in a cultivated Englishman than in the more childlike German,—the same love of homely naturalness of manner, of the wholesome flavour of earth, an even deeper desire to tame or exorcise all romance that is alien to common sense, and the same intellectual disposition to give common sense the casting vote, wherever there seems to be a conflict between it and the thirst of their own natures for something deeper. Moreover, in Clough's poem there is the same underlying theme which haunted Goethe so constantly,—the wish to analyse the true secret of womanly fascination, and finally, the key-note of the answer given in the 'Long Vacation Pastoral' is also the key-note of the 'Hermann and Dorothea,' that the highest charms of women consist in a certain union between homely usefulness and classical beauty, in the graceful cutting of bread-and-butter, like Werther's 'Charlotte,' or graceful "potato-uprooting," like Philip's heroine in Clough's Pastoral. As one of his "reading" party expresses it:—

"All cathedrals are Christian, all Christians are cathedrals:
Such is the Catholic doctrine; 'tis ours with a slight variation.
Every woman is or ought to be a cathedral,
Built on the ancient plan—a cathedral pure and perfect,
Built by that only law, that Use be suggester of Beauty;
Nothing concealed that is done, but all things done to adornment;
Meanest utilities seized as occasions to grace and embellish."

But if the school of art and the predominant thought which marks Goethe's 'Hermann and Dorothea" and Clough's poem are the same,—if they both alike seek and find their ideal of women in "the freshness of the early world," in some well-born or well-taught maiden,

"Milking the kine in the field; like Rachel watering cattle,
Rachel, when at the well the predestined beheld and kissed her;
Or with pail upon head, like Dora beloved of Alexis,
Comely, with well-poised pail over neck arching soft to the shoulders,
Comely in gracefullest act, one arm uplifted to stay it,
Home from the river or pump moving stately and calm to the laundry;"

—yet all the imaginative form and framework of Clough's poem are entirely his own,—entirely original, and marked strongly with the stamp of its Oxford origin.

The almost Homeric vigour with which all the characteristics of the reading party are dashed off, the genial humour with which their personal peculiarities are coloured in, the buoyant life of the discussions which arise among them, the strength with which the Highland scenery is conceived and rendered in a few brilliant touches, the tenderness and simplicity with which now

and then the deeper pathos of life is allowed to be seen in glimpses through the intellectual play of the poem, are all Clough's own. He is far more terse, far less prolix than the great German poet in his style of painting homely nature. There is none of that relaxed fibre which makes scoffers say that Goethe is a little spooney on his Charlotte's bread-and-butter, and his Dorothea's proficiency as a waggoner. Clough's poem is masculine throughout, though the sentiment is perhaps not entirely healthy, and the humour, therefore, is of a kind of which Goethe had little trace. Here, for example, is Airlie, the high dresser of the party :—

"Airlie descended the last, effulgent as god of Olympus ;
Blue, half-doubtfully blue, was the coat that had white silk facings ;
Waistcoat blue, coral buttoned, the white tie finely adjusted,
Coral moreover the studs on a shirt as of crochet of women :
When the fourwheel for ten minutes already had stood at the gateway,
He, like a god, came leaving his ample Olympian chamber."

And here is a Highland dance, in which Airlie again figures, described with all the humour and force of a modern Homer :—

"——Him rivalling, Hobbes, briefest kilted of heroes,
Enters, O stoutest, O rashest of creatures, mere fool of a Saxon,
Skill-less of philibeg, skill-less of reel too, the whirl and the twirl o't :
Him see I frisking and whisking, and ever at swifter gyration
Under brief curtain revealing broad acres—not of broad cloth.
Him see I there and the Piper—the Piper what vision beholds not ?
Him and his Honour with Arthur, with Janet our Piper, and is it,
Is it, O marvel of marvels ! he too in the maze of the mazy,
Skipping and tripping, though stately, though languid, with head on one shoulder,

Airlie, with sight of the waistcoat the golden-haired Katie consoling?
Katie, who simple and comely, and smiling and blushing as ever,
What though she wear on that neck a blue kerchief, remembered as Philip's,
Seems in her maidenly freedom to need small consolement of waistcoats!"

Or take the description of Sir Hector's speech at the clansmen's dinner, which is rich in Homeric metaphor, as well as modern humour:—

"Bid me not, grammar defying, repeat from grammar defiers
Long constructions strange, and plusquam-Thucydidean,
Tell how, as sudden torrent in time of speat in the mountain
Hurries six ways at once, and takes at last to the roughest,
Or as the practised rider at Astley's or Franconi's,
Skilfully, boldly bestrides many steeds at once in the gallop.
Crossing from this to that, with one leg here, one yonder,
So, less skilful, but equally bold and wild as the torrent,
All through sentences six at a time, unsuspecting of syntax,
Hurried the lively good will and garrulous tale of Sir Hector."

Not, however, by such passages as these can be measured the depth and fulness of Clough's poetic nature. I have said that, in his dread of the romantic school, and his longing for that antique type of nobility in which the simpler and more homely tasks are associated with classical grace and dignity, he had borrowed much from Goethe. But his mind had been also deeply influenced by the very different poetry of Wordsworth in his strong love of a frugal, hardy, and simple industry as the highest school of human character. And perhaps too, in spite of his steady preference of Aristotle to Plato, of common sense to what he thought idealism, of

what is common to what is high, the deep and sometimes transcendental musings of Wordsworth's meditative mind had a charm for him of which he was almost ashamed. At all events, there is a gleam of transcendental depth and subtlety here and again in this poem, shyly—almost apologetically—put forth, and scarcely put forth but to be withdrawn. The lines in which Elspie confesses her love for Philip, the radiant poet, are couched in a very different key from that of Goethe's naturalistic school,—a different, and I think a higher key :—

"And she was silent some time, and blushed all over, and answered
Quietly, after her fashion, still knitting, 'Maybe I think of it,
Though I don't know that I did ;' and she paused again. 'But it may be ;
Yes, I don't know, Mr. Philip, but only it feels to me strangely
Like to the high new bridge they used to build at, below there,
Over the burn and glen on the road. You won't understand me.
But I keep saying in my mind—this long time, slowly with trouble,
I have been building myself up, up, and toilfully raising,
Just like as if the bridge were to do it itself without masons,
Painfully getting myself upraised one stone on another,
All one side, I mean ; and now I see on the other
Just such another fabric uprising, better and stronger,
Close to me, coming to join me. And then I sometimes fancy,—
Sometimes I find myself dreaming at night about arches and bridges,—
Sometimes I dream of a great invisible hand coming down and
Dropping the great key-stone in the middle ; there in my dreaming
There I felt the great keystone coming in, and through it
Feel the other part,—all the other stones of the archway,
Joined into mine, with a strange happy sense of completeness. But, dear me,
This is confusion and nonsense. I mix all the things I can think of,
And you won't understand, Mr. Philip.'"

This is a definite addition to the great doctrine of the poem, that women, like flowers, must be "rooted in earth" to be either beautiful or useful—a definite addition and a noble addition. Here we have something of Wordsworth's conception of the poet:—

> "The outward shows of sky and earth,
> Of hill and valley, he has viewed,
> And impulses of deeper birth
> Have come to him in solitude."

There are "impulses of deeper birth" struggling with the naturalism of Clough's chosen school of thought. Still, the great sea, and the wide omnipresent sunlight, are his favourite symbols of what is divine,—what is broad, bright, and simple, rather than what is lofty, mysterious, and dim.

Clough always seems to have needed external stimulus, something of excitement in the atmosphere, for his best poetic success. Thus, the siege of Rome during his residence there in 1849 was the stimulus which gave rise to his very original and striking poem, 'Amours de Voyage,'—a poem brimful of the breath of his Oxford culture, of Dr. Newman's metaphysics, of classical tradition, of the political enthusiasm of the time, and of his own large, speculative humour, subtle hesitancy of brain, and rich pictorial sense. Yet so ill-satisfied was he with this striking poem, that he kept it nine years in MS., and published it apologetically at last only in an American magazine, the 'Atlantic Monthly.' He himself says that what he doubted about in it was not

its truth of conception, but its vigour of execution. Yet no execution could have been more perfect of the picture—a picture of inchoacy, I admit—which he intended to draw. Mr. Emerson has in some cases shown himself a fine critic; but he never made a more egregious blunder than when he found fault with Clough for not making this poem end more satisfactorily. The whole meaning and drift of it would have been spoiled if it had so ended. His idea was to draw a mind so reluctant to enter on action, shrinking so morbidly from the effects of the "ruinous force of the will," that even when most desirous of action it would find a hundred trivial intellectual excuses for shrinking back in spite of that desire. His own explanation of the poem is contained in the final verse:—

"'So go forth to the world, to the good report and the evil!
'Go, little book! thy tale, is it not evil and good?
Go, and if strangers revile, pass quietly by without answer.
Go, and if curious friends ask of thy rearing and age,
Say, 'I am flitting about many years from brain unto brain of
Feeble and restless youths born to inglorious days:
But,' so finish the word, 'I was writ in a Roman chamber,
When from Janiculan heights thundered the cannon of France.'"

And it is this brain of what the author chooses to call "feeble and restless youths born to inglorious days" that the poem is meant to delineate throughout,—its speculative discontent, its passion for the abstract, its dread of being committed to a course, its none the less eager craving for action and for the life that can only be reached through action, its driftings

and reactions;—and all this is artistically contrasted with the great Roman stage on which so many great dramas had been enacted in years gone by, and whereon one great revolutionary drama was going forward at that very moment. To my mind, the poem would lose half its character and meaning if the hero's incipiency of passion had been developed into anything but incipiency, if it had not faded away, just as it is represented as doing, with the first difficulties, into a restless but still half-relieved passiveness. The irony of the poem, with its background of Mazzinian and Garibaldian achievement, would have been utterly spoiled by any other conclusion. How perfect a picture of the paralysis caused by too subtly speculative a nature is there in such lines as these, for example, in which the hero declares his intention to abide by the indications of the first adverse throw of fortune:—

> "Great is Fate, and is best. I believe in Providence partly.
> What is ordained is right, and all that happens is ordered.
> *Ah, no, that isn't it! But yet I retain my conclusion.*
> I will go where I am led, and will not dictate to the chances."

'Amours de Voyage' would indeed have been spoiled, if it had ended "prettily," like any other novel.

The oftener I return to Clough's unfinished but striking poems, the more I am struck by something in their fresh natural handling, and a certain lustre of sunlight on their surface, which suggest to me a modern and intellectualised Chaucer; and I think the same homely breadth and simplicity were strongly marked in his

countenance. Of course, the whole essence of such genius is changed by the intellectual conditions of Clough's age, and the still higher intellectual conditions of his personal career. But the characteristic is only the more strongly marked for such striking and fundamental variations; and had he lived to fill more completely with his individual genius, and to complete, the beautiful fragments of tales which are entitled 'In Mari Magno,' every one would have noticed not merely an external resemblance in structure and scheme, but a very close analogy in genius between the 'Canterbury Tales' by the father of English poetry, and the series by this later representative of our academic school. This Chaucer-like love of the natural simplicities of life was probably Clough's strongest creative impulse; his mode of describing is in the same style of bold, direct, affectionate feeling for the earth and the true children of the earth; and the homely though polished pathos of his stories have again and again filled me with like haunting associations, even when the analogy was so much disguised by the different intellectual accent of our times that its secret was not easy to catch. In the following piece, there is certainly no manner of difficulty in tracing the resemblance. But though the similarity of mere style may arise from Clough's own familiarity with the poet, and with the tales whose plan he was adopting, the portrait is certainly studied from an ecclesiastical type quite foreign to Chaucer's age:—

" The vicar was of bulk and thews,
Six feet he stood within his shoes,
And every inch of all a man ;
Ecclesiast, on the ancient plan,
Unforced by any party rule
His native character to school ;
In ancient learning not unread,
But had few doctrines in his head ;
Dissenters truly he abhorred ;
They never had his gracious word.
He ne'er was bitter, or unkind,
But positively spoke his mind ;
Their piety he could not bear,—
A sneaking snivelling set they were.
Their tricks and meanness fired his blood ;
Up for his Church he stoutly stood.
No worldly aim had he in life
To set him with himself at strife.
A spade, a spade he freely named,
And of his joke was not ashamed ;
Made it, and laughed at it, be sure,
With young and old, with rich and poor.
His sermons frequently he took
Out of some standard reverend book ;
They seemed a little strange indeed,
But were not likely to mislead.
Others he gave that were his own,—
The difference could be quickly known.
Though sorry not to have a boy,
His daughters were his perfect joy ;
He plagued them, oft drew tears from each,
Was bold and hasty in his speech,
All through the house you heard him call,
He had his vocatives for all ;
Patty Patina, Pat became,
Lydia took Languish with her name ;
Philippa was the Gentle Queen,
And Phœbe Madam Prosperine ;

The pseudonyms for Mary Gwen
Varied with every week again;
But Emily, of all the set,
Emilia called, was most the pet."

It is not the mere forms here, it is the simple, direct manner of painting which brings back a flavour of Chaucer to the memory as we read the more intellectual poet of modern days. Look, again, at Clough's feeling for women's beauty; the mingled breadth and tenderness of his drawing, his keen sense of the healthy simplicity of true womanliness, his constant preference for the true woman rather than the true lady, his evident bias for that which has its root in the homely earth, though it attains a beauty which earth alone could not give; it is Chaucer become conscious of the difference between his own inner mind and the taste of our modern intellectual day. Chaucer describes his ideas of feminine loveliness in the person of Blanche, wife of John of Gaunt, thus :—

"I sawgh hir daunce so comeley,
Carole and synge so swetely,
Laughe and pleye so womanly,
And loke so debonairly;
So goodely speke, and so friendly;
That, certes, I trow that evermore
Nas (was not) seyne so blysful a tresore.
For every heer on hir hede,
Sothe to seyne, hyt nas not rede,
Ne nouther yelowe, ne browne, hyt nas,
Me thought most lyke golde hyt was.
And whiche eyen (eyes) my lady hadde!
Debonaire, goode, glade, and sadde (grave),

Symple, of goode mochel, nought to wide.
Therto hir looke was not asyde,
Ne overtwert, but besette to wele,
It drewe and took everydele,
Alle that on hir gonne beholde."

And now let me take an extract from one of Clough's tales to compare with this picture of Chaucer's :—

"A highland inn amongst the western hills,'
A single parlour, single bed, that fills
With fisher or with tourist as may be ;
A waiting maid as fair as you can see,
With hazel eyes and frequent blushing face,
And ample brow, and with a rustic grace
In all her easy ample motions seen,
Large of her age, which haply is nineteen ;
Christian her name, in full a pleasant name,
Christian and Christie scarcely seem the same.
A college fellow who has sent away
The pupils he has taught for many a day,
And comes for fishing and for solitude,
Perhaps a little pensive in his mood,
An aspiration and a thought have failed,
Where he had hoped, another has prevailed,
But to the joys of hill and stream alive,
And in his boyhood yet at twenty-five.
A merry dance that made young people meet,
And set them moving both with hands and feet :
A dance in which he danced and nearer knew
The soft brown eyes, and found them tender too.
A dance that lit in two young hearts the fire,
The low soft flame of loving sweet desire,
And made him feel that he could feel again ;
The preface this what follows to explain."

Of course the parallel must not be pushed too far, for even Chaucer, if possessed of all the new culture, and striving to harmonize it with his large, simple, healthy,

human tastes, would become quite a new man. And no doubt Clough's poetry is in nature and essence intellectual. Still there is no poet of our generation whose intellectuality gives less of the effect of a thinning and refining away of life to a shadow than Clough. Such subtlety as there is in him is of a broad, sweeping, comprehensive kind, not logical but practical; not the fine instinct with which Tennyson, for instance, follows out one by one a hundred shadowy paths of imaginative reasoning, but the wide subtlety which hovers hither and thither over one or two of the greater chasms that separate thought from action. The ground quakes under Clough's feet at points where generally it would be supposed firm; and where ordinary men's imaginative doubts begin, his scarcely reach. The effect on his poetry is to exercise his imagination in depicting not so much universal feelings as the craving of the cultivated mind for *permission* to surrender to them. In some of his most characteristic verses he asks:—

> "What we, when face to face we see
> The Father of our souls, shall be,
> John tells us, does not yet appear;
> Ah! did he tell what we are here!
>
> A mind for thoughts to pass into,
> A heart for loves to travel through,
> Five senses to detect things near,
> Is this the whole that we are here?
>
> Rules baffle instincts—instincts rules,
> Wise men are bad—and good are fools;
> Facts evil—wishes vain appear,
> We cannot go, why are we here?

O may we for assurance' sake,
Some arbitrary judgment take,
And wilfully pronounce it clear
For this or that 'tis we are here?

Or is it right, and will it do,
To pace the sad confusion through,
And say :—'It doth not yet appear,
What we shall be, what we are here'?

Ah! yet when all is thought and said,
The heart still overrules the head;
Still what we hope we must believe,
And what is given us, receive;

Must still believe; for still we hope
That in a world of larger scope,
What here is faithfully begun
Will be completed, not undone.

My child, we still must think, when we
That ampler life together see,
Some true result will yet appear
Of what we are, together, here."

This, like almost all Clough's poems of this class, presents the effect of a homely, simple, human beauty, half undermined by fundamental doubts,—doubts suggested, indeed, only to be partially abandoned, but also to be partially maintained, as a preservative against the blind eager confidence of presumptuous faith. The massive and genial sympathy which Clough feels with the universal instincts of human nature, alike religious and social, is the first marked feature that strikes us in all his poems: then the sifting process begins of tracing them to their roots, showing how much wider is the trust placed in them in the practical conduct of modern life, than it is

possible to justify intellectually; and then when he has pared these instincts down to their minimum of meaning, and we have been shown how impossible our whole life would be if they were given no greater validity than that, they are permitted, though with hesitation and a doubtful or rather hypothetical confidence, to take back something of their natural authority, now that it is fairly shown to be liable to all kinds of presumptuous error.

No doubt, this sort of large, half-genial suspense of judgment, that looks upon natural instincts with a sort of loving doubt, and yields with cautious hand a certain limited authority to human yearnings in order not wholly to lose a share in the moving forces of life, is not likely to be widely popular. With Clough this suspense of human judgment was unfortunately not supplemented by any confident belief in a divine answer to those vague yearnings, and consequently his tone is almost always at once sweet and sad. It is saturated with the deep but musical melancholy of such thoughts as the following, whose pathos shows how much more profoundly and deeply Clough thirsted for truth than many of even the most confident of those of us who believe that there is a living water at which to slake our thirst:—

> "To spend uncounted years of pain,
> Again, again, and yet again,
> In working out in heart and brain
> The problem of our being here;
> To gather facts from far and near,
> Upon the mind to hold them clear,

> And, knowing more may yet appear,
> Unto one's latest breath to fear
> The premature result to draw—
> Is this the object, end, and law,
> And purpose of our being here?"

Yet even in poetry of this kind, which abounds in the volume, there is something of the same large, hesitating melancholy that we should expect, if once a mind of homely Chaucer-like wisdom fell under a cloud of modern doubt. Instead of applying itself, like the ordinary scepticism, to particular riddles, it would touch the whole substance of life, not unkindly, with Clough's questioning finger; treat the fundamental instincts which guide us into our human relations with the same half-confidence; try to separate, even in dealing with "love," the real affinity of nature from the "juxtaposition" of habit, and show the problem to be indeterminate with the same quaint humour. And in things divine it would state the problem as fairly, and substitute a sigh of pathetic hope for the solution, with the same sad fidelity. It may be something of a fancy, but it is at all events a fancy that touches the border of truth, if I recognise even in the type of Clough's genial scepticism something not entirely unlike the scepticism which might pervade the mind of a Chaucer, watching with the old homely shrewdness as well as the rich modern culture, the swaying tides of our theological debate, and clinging too closely itself to the human forms of beauty and goodness to come with any clear personal conviction, out of the strife.

And yet Clough's great literary powers never mani-

fested themselves even to his most intimate friends by any outward sign at all commensurate with the profound belief they had in his genius. But if his powers did not, there was much in his character that did produce its full effect upon all who knew him. He steadily refrained from looking, even in time of severe trial, to his own interest, when what seemed to him higher interests were at issue. He never flinched from the worldly loss which his deepest convictions brought on him. Even when clouds were thick over his own head, and the ground beneath his feet seemed crumbling away, he could still bear witness to an eternal light behind the cloud, and tell others that there is solid ground to be reached in the end by the feet of all who will wait to be strong :—

"Say not, the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been, they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars,
It may be, in yon smoke concealed
Your comrades chased e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light :
In front the sun climbs slow—how slowly !
But westward, look, the land is bright."

I do not think that any competent judge who really

studies Clough's Remains will doubt for a moment that he was one of the most original men of our age, and perhaps its most intellectual, and buoyant, though very far, of course, from its richest, most musical and exquisite poet. There is a very peculiar and unique attraction about what I may call the physical and almost animal buoyancy of these subtly intellectual rhythms and verses, when once the mass of the poet's mind—by no means easy to get into motion—is fairly under weigh. Mr. Matthew Arnold and Clough both represent the stream of the modern Oxford intellectual tradition in their poems, but how different is their genius. With all his intellectual precision, there is something of the boyishness, of the simplicity, of the vascular Saxon breadth of Chaucer's poetry in Clough; while Mr. Arnold's poetical ancestor is certainly no earlier than Wordsworth. There are both flesh and spirit, as well as emotion and speculation, in Clough; while, in Mr. Arnold, soul and sentiment guide the emotion and the speculation. There is tenderness in both; but Clough's is the tenderness of earthly sympathy, and Mr. Arnold's the lyrical cry of Virgilian compassion. Both fill half their poems with the most subtle intellectual meditations; but Clough leaves them all but where they were, not even half settled, reproaching himself for mooning over them so long; while Mr. Arnold finds some sort of a delicate solution, or no-solution, for all of them, and sorts them with the finest nicety. Finally, when they both reach their highest poetical point, Mr. Arnold is

found painting lucidly in a region of pure and exquisite sentiment, Clough singing a sort of pæan of buoyant and exultant strength :—

" But, O, blithe breeze, and O, great seas,
Though ne'er, that earliest parting past,
On your wide plain they join again,
Together lead them home at last !

One port, methought, alike they sought,
One purpose hold where'er they fare.
O, bounding breeze, O, rushing seas ,
At last, at last, unite them there ! "

VIII.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

HAWTHORNE has been called a mystic, which, he was not,—and a psychological dreamer, which he was in very slight degree. He was really the ghost of New England,—I do not mean the "spirit," nor the "phantom," but the ghost in the older sense in which that term is used, the thin, rarified essence which is to be found somewhere behind the physical organization: embodied, indeed, and not by any means in a shadowy or diminutive earthly tabernacle, but yet only half embodied in it, endowed with a certain painful sense of the gulf between his nature and its organization, always recognising the gulf, always trying to bridge it over, and always more or less unsuccessful in the attempt. His writings are not exactly spiritual writings, for there is no dominating spirit in them. They are ghostly writings. Hawthorne was, to my mind, a sort of sign to New England of the divorce that has been going on there (and

not less perhaps in old England) between its people's spiritual and earthly nature, and of the difficulty which they will soon feel, if they are to be absorbed more and more in that shrewd hard earthly sense which is one of their most striking characteristics, in even *communicating* with their former self. Hawthorne, with all his shyness, and tenderness, and literary reticence, shows very distinct traces also of understanding well the cold, inquisitive, and shrewd spirit which besets the Yankees even more than other commercial peoples. His heroes have usually not a little of this hardness in them. Coverdale, for instance, in the 'Blithedale Romance,' and Holgrave, in the 'House of the Seven Gables,' are of this class of shrewd, cold, inquisitive heroes. Indeed there are few of his tales without a character of this type. But though Hawthorne had a deep sympathy with the practical as well as the literary genius of New England, it was always in a far-removed and ghostly kind of way, as though he were stricken by some spell which half-paralysed him from communicating with the life around him, as though he saw it only by a reflected light. His spirit haunted rather than ruled his body; his body hampered his spirit.

Yet his external career was not only not romantic, but identified with all the dullest routine of commercial duties. That a man who consciously *telegraphed*, as it were, with the world, transmitting meagre messages through his material organization, should have been first a Custom-house officer in Massachusetts, and then

the Consul in Liverpool, brings out into the strongest possible relief the curiously representative character in which he stood to New England as its literary or intellectual ghost. There is nothing more ghostly in his writings than his account of the Consulship in Liverpool, —how he began by trying to communicate frankly with his fellow-countrymen, how he found the task more and more difficult, and gradually drew back into the twilight of his reserve, how he shrewdly and somewhat coldly watched "the dim shadows as they go and come," speculated idly on their fate, and all the time discharged the regular routine of Consular business, witnessing the usual depositions, giving captains to captainless crews, affording costive advice or assistance to Yankees when in need of a friend, listening to them when they were only anxious to offer, not ask, assistance, and generally observing them from that distant and speculative outpost of the universe whence all common things looked strange.

Hawthorne, who was a delicate critic of himself, was well aware of the shadowy character of his own genius, though not aware that precisely here lay its curious and thrilling power. In the preface to 'Twice-told Tales' he tells us frankly, "The book, if you would see anything in it, requires to be read in the clear brown twilight atmosphere in which it was written; if opened in the sunshine, it is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages."

It is one of his favourite theories that there must be

a vague, remote, and shadowy element in the subject-matter of any narrative with which his own imagination can successfully deal. Sometimes he apologises for this idealistic limitation to his artistic aims. "It was a folly," he says in his preface to the 'Scarlet Letter,' "with the materiality of this daily life pressing so intrusively upon me, to attempt to fling myself back into another age, or to insist on creating the semblance of a world out of airy matter, when, at every moment, the impalpable beauty of my soap-bubble was broken by the rude contact of some actual circumstance. The wiser effort would have been to diffuse thought and imagination through the opaque substance of to-day, and thus to make it a bright transparency; to spiritualise the burden that began to weigh so heavily; to seek resolutely the true and indestructible value that lay hidden in the petty and wearisome incidents and ordinary characters with which I was now conversant. The fault was mine. The page of life that was spread out before me was so dull and commonplace only because I had not fathomed its deeper import. A better book than I shall ever write was there; leaf after leaf presenting itself to me, just as it was written out by the reality of the flitting hour, and vanishing as fast as written, only because my brain wanted the insight and my hand the cunning to transcribe it. At some future day, it may be, I shall remember a few scattered fragments and broken paragraphs and write them down and find the letters turn to gold upon the page."

And yet that dissatisfaction with his own idealism which Hawthorne here expresses never actually sufficed to divert his efforts into the channel indicated. In the 'Blithedale Romance' he tells us that he chose the external scenery of the Socialist community at Brook Farm "merely to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives. In the old countries with which fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day probability, in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is as yet no such Fairy Land so like the real world that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own. This atmosphere is what the American romancer wants. In its absence, the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals,—a necessity that generally renders the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too painfully discernible." And once more, in the preface to his last novel, 'Transformation,' he reiterates as his excuse for laying the scene in Italy, that "no author without a trial can conceive of the diffi-

culty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily-handled themes either in the annals of our stalwart republic, or in any characteristic and probable event of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need ruin to make them grow." These passages throw much light on the secret affinities of Hawthorne's genius. But it would be a mistake to conclude from them, as he himself would apparently have us, that he is a mere romantic idealist, in the sense in which these words are commonly used,—that he is one all whose dramatic conceptions are but the unreal kaleidoscopic combinations of fancies in his own brain.

I may, perhaps, accept a phrase of which Hawthorne himself was fond,—"the moonlight of romance,"—and compel it to explain something of the secret of his characteristic genius. There are writers—chiefly poets, but also occasionally writers of fanciful romances like Longfellow's 'Hyperion'—whose productions are purely ideal, are not only seen by the light of their own imagination but constituted out of it,—made of moonshine,—and rendered vivid and beautiful, if they are vivid and beautiful, merely with the vividness and beauty of the poet's own mind. In these cases there is no distinction at all between the delineating power and the delineated

object; the dream is indistinguishable from the mind of the dreamer, and varies wholly with its laws. Again, at the opposite extreme, there is a kind of creative imagination which has its origin in a deep sympathy with, and knowledge of, the real world. That which it deals with is actual life as it has existed, or still exists, in forms so innumerable that it is scarcely possible to assert that its range is more limited than life itself. Of course the only adequate example of such an imagination is Shakespeare's, and this kind of imaginative power resembles sunlight, not only in its brilliancy, but especially in this, that it casts a light so full and equable over the universe it reveals, that we never think of its source at all. We forget altogether, as we do by common daylight, that the light by which we see is not part and parcel of the world which it presents to us. The sunlight is so efficient that we forget the sun. We find so rich and various a world before us, dressed in its own proper colours, that no one is reminded that the medium by which those proper colours are seen is uniform and from a single source. We merge the delineative magic by which the scene is illuminated in the details of the scene itself.

Between these two kinds of creative imagination there is another, which also shows a real world, but shows it so dimly in comparison with the last as to keep constantly before our minds the unique character of the light by which we see. The ideal light itself becomes a more prominent element in the picture than even the objects on

which it shines; and yet is made so, chiefly by the very fact of shining on those objects which we are accustomed to think of as they are seen in their own familiar details in full daylight. If the objects illuminated were not real and familiar, the light would not seem so mysterious; it is the pale uniform tint, the loss of colour and detail, and yet the vivid familiar outline and the strong shadow, which produce what Hawthorne calls the "moonlight of romance." "Moonlight in a familiar room," he says, in his preface to the 'Scarlet Letter,' "falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly, making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility,—is a medium the most suitable for a romance writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests. There is the little domestic scenery of the well-known apartment; the chairs, with each its separate individuality; the centre table, sustaining a work-basket, a volume or two, and an extinguished lamp; the sofa, the bookcase, the picture on the wall;—all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualised by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance and become things of intellect. Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby. A child's shoe, the doll seated in her little wicker carriage, the hobby-horse,—whatever, in a word, has been used or played with during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has

become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other." Sir Walter Scott's delineative power partakes both of this moonlight imagination and of the other more powerful, brilliant, and realistic kind. Often it is a wide genial sunshine, of which we quite forget the source in the vividness of the common life which it irradiates. At other times, again, when Scott is in his Black Douglas mood, as I may call it, it has all the uniformity of tint and the exciting pallor of what Hawthorne terms the moonlight of romance.

At all events, there is no writer to whose creations the phrase applies more closely than to Hawthorne's own. His characters are by no means such unreal webs of moonshine as the idealists proper constitute into the figures of their romance. They are real and definitely outlined, but they are all seen in a single light,—the contemplative light of the particular idea which has floated before him in each of his stories,—and they are seen, not fully and in their integrity, as things are seen by daylight, but like things touched by moonlight, *only so far* as they are lighted up by the idea of the story. The thread of unity which connects his tales is always some pervading thought of his own; they are not written mainly to display character, still less for the mere narrative interest, but for the illustration they cast on some idea or conviction of their author's. Amongst English writers of fiction, we have many besides Shake-

speare whose stories are merely appropriate instruments for the portraiture of character, and who therefore never conceive themselves bound to confine themselves scrupulously to the one aspect most naturally developed by the tale. Once introduced, their characters are given in full,—both that side of them which is, so to say, turned *towards* the story, and others which are not. Other writers, again, make the characters quite subsidiary to the epical interest of the plot, using them only to heighten the colouring of the action it describes. Hawthorne's tales belong to neither of these classes. Their unity is ideal. His characters are often real and distinct, but they are illuminated only from one centre of thought. So strictly is this true of them that he has barely *room* for a novel in the ordinary sense of the word. If he were to take his characters through as many phases of life as are ordinarily comprised in a novel, he could not keep the ideal unity of his tales unbroken; he would be obliged to delineate them from many different points of view. Accordingly his novels are not novels in the ordinary sense; they are ideal situations, expanded by minute study and trains of clear, pale thought into the dimensions of novels. A very small group of figures is presented to the reader in some marked ideal relation; or if it be in consequence of some critical event, then it must be some event which has struck the author as rich in ideal or spiritual suggestion. But it is not usually in his way—though his last novel gives us one remarkable exception to this observation—to seize any glowing

crisis of action when the passion is lit or the blow is struck that gives a new mould to life, for his delineation; he prefers to assume the crisis past, and to delineate as fully as he can the ideal situation to which it has given rise, when it is beginning to assume a fainter and more chronic character.

But, however this may be, almost all Hawthorne's tales embody single ideal situations, scarcely ever for a moment varied in their course in any essential respect. For instance, to take his shorter tales, the mockery of the attempt to renew in wasted age the blasted hopes of youth is crystallized into a ghostly *tableau vivant* in the 'Wedding-Knell.' The absolute isolation of every man's deepest life, and the awe which any visible assertion of that isolation inspires, even when made by the mildest of our guilty race, is translated into an eerie picture in the 'Minister's Black Veil.' So in the 'Great Stone Face' we have an embodiment of the conviction that *he* is best fitted to fulfil any great human hope or trust whose heart is constantly fed upon the yearning to find the perfect fulfilment of it in another. So in 'Roger Malvin's Burial' we are shown how an innocent man, who is too cowardly to face the mere appearance of guilt, may thereby incur a remorse and guilt as deep as that from the faintest suspicion of which he shrank. And so we may run through almost all the tales properly so called.

I do not mean that in any of them the author thought the thought first in its abstract form, and then

condensed it into a story. I should suppose, on the contrary, that the artistic form is the one in which the idea of the tale first flashed on him, and that the work of elaboration only gave more substance and greater variety of colour to the parts. But not the less was the essence originally ideal, since every touch and line in his imagined picture was calculated to impress some leading thought on the reader.

But it is only when we look at his longer tales, whose dimensions would lead us to expect more variety of aspect in the characters, more circumstance, and less sameness of leading *thought*, that this characteristic of Hawthorne's tales becomes striking. The stories of the 'Scarlet Letter,' of the 'House of the Seven Gables,' and of 'Transformation,' might all have been included in their full ideal integrity, and with all the incident they contain, in the 'Twice-told Tales' without adding more than a few pages to the book. I do not mean that thus compressed they would produce the same, or anything like the same, haunting impression; but only that, as far as either the *aspect* of his characters or the circumstantial interest of the stories is concerned, there need be no compression in thus shortening them. The omissions would be most important, indeed, to the effect; but they would be the omission of pale contemplative touches, imaginative self-repetitions, and so forth, which seldom indeed give us a single glimpse of any other than the one side of his characters, or add a second thread to the one interest of the tale.

In the 'Scarlet Letter,' for instance, there is but one conception, which is developed in three—perhaps I should say four—scenes of great power, and that is the deranging effect of the sin of adultery on the intrinsically fine characters of those principally affected by it, with a special view to its different influence on the woman, who is openly branded with the shame, and on the man, whose guilt is not published, and who has a double remorse to suffer, for the sin, and for the growing burden of insincerity. The effect of the sin on the child who is the offspring of it is made a special study, as are the false relations it introduces between the mother and child. Throughout the tale every one of the group of characters studied is seen in the lurid light of this sin, and in no other. The only failure is in the case of the injured and vindictive husband, whose character is subordinated entirely to the artistic development of the other three.

In the same way the predominant idea of the 'Blithedale Romance' is to delineate the deranging effect of an absorbing philanthropic idea on a powerful mind,—the unscrupulous sacrifices of personal claims which it induces, and the misery in which it ends. There is scarcely one *incident* in the tale properly so called except the catastrophe, and what there is is so shrouded in mystery as to have the enigmatic character of a *tableau vivant*, not too mysterious for a distinct drift, but of doubtful interpretation as to details. The author seems to say to the reader, 'Here is a group of characters in relations

tending to illustrate how much more sacred are personal affections than any abstract *cause*, however noble: what these relations exactly are, except as they illustrate my idea, I will not say, as that is quite non-essential; you may imagine them what you please,—I tell you only enough to impress you with my predominant conviction.'

Again, in the 'House of the Seven Gables' we have a picture studied to impress on us that both personal character, and the malign influences of evil action, are transmitted, sometimes with accumulating force, even through centuries, blighting every generation through which they pass. This subject would apparently involve a series of sketches; but only two are introduced from the past, and the family characteristics are so anxiously preserved as to make even these seem like slight modifications of some of the living group. Hawthorne with rare art pictures the shadow of the past as constantly hanging, like a baneful cloud, over the heads of his figures; and every detail, even the minutest, is made to point backwards to the weary past from which it has derived its constitutional peculiarities. Even the little shop which "old maid Pyncheon" reopens in the dark old house is not new. A miserly ancestor of the family had opened it a century before, who is supposed to haunt it, and the scales are rusty with the rust of generations. The half-effaced picture of the ancestral Pyncheon which hangs on the walls, the garden-mould black with the vegetable decay of centuries, the exhausted

breed of aristocratic fowls which inhabit the garden,—every touch is studied to condense the dark past into a cloud hanging over the living present, and make the reader feel its malign influence. The only incident in the tale is the light thrown upon a crime,—which had been committed thirty years before the story opens,—by the sudden death of the principal representative of the family, from the same specific disease, in the same chair, and under the same circumstances, as that of the old ancestor and founder of the family whose picture hangs above the chair.

The same criticism may be made on Hawthorne's last complete novel. The sole idea of 'Transformation' is to illustrate the intellectually and morally awakening power of a sudden impulsive sin, committed by a simple joyous, instinctive, "natural" man. The whole group of characters is imagined solely with a view to the development of this idea. Hawthorne even hints, though rather hesitatingly, that without sin the higher humanity of man could not be taken up at all; that sin may be essential to the first conscious awakening of moral freedom and the possibility of progress. The act of sin itself is the only distinct incident of the tale; all the rest is either extraneous dissertation on Art, or the elaboration and study of the group of characters requisite to embody this leading idea. A tale containing the whole ideal essence of the book, and in this instance, though only in this instance, almost equally powerful, might have been told in a few pages.

And yet I am very far indeed from meaning to say that the microscopic diffuseness with which Hawthorne enlarges these mystic studies into the length of an ordinary novel is wasted. For the secret of his power lies in the great art with which he reduplicates and reflects and re-reflects the main idea of the tale from the countless faces of his ghostly imagination, until the reader's mind is absolutely haunted by it. There are many among his shorter tales, which now occupy perhaps only five or ten pages, which would have gained infinitely in power by similar treatment, without the addition of a single fresh incident or scene. As they read now they have almost a feeble effect; they give the writer's idea, and no more; they do not fill the reader with it; and Hawthorne's peculiar genius lies in the power he possesses to be haunted, and in his turn to haunt the reader with his conceptions, far more than in their intrinsic force. Look at the central notion of his various minor tales, and you will perhaps be struck with a certain ideal simplicity, and a strange dash of lurid colour in them that will impress you as promising, but no more. But let him summon this idea before you in the innumerable Protean shapes of his own imagination, with alterations of form just striking enough to make it seem at once the same and something fresh, and before he has done with you you are pursued, you are possessed, you are beset with his notion: it is in your very blood; it stares at you with ghastly force from every word of his narrative; it is in the earth and in the air; and every mouth that

opens among his characters, however little they may be involved in the mystery of the tale, only sends it thrilling with greater force through your heart. What a story, for instance, might he not have made out of the very eerie tales called 'Roger Malvin's Burial,' or 'Rappacini's Daughter,' if he had elaborated them with anything like the art shown in the 'House of the Seven Gables'!

Hawthorne was quite aware of the slight ideal structure of his earlier and shorter tales. He himself criticised them with rare candour and subtlety, though not with a fair appreciation of the promise of deeper power which they contained, in that preface to one of the editions of the 'Twice-told Tales,' to which I have already once referred :—

"At all events, there can be no harm in the Author's remarking that he rather wonders how the 'Twice-told Tales' should have gained what vogue they did, than that it was so little and so gradual. They have the pale tint of flowers that blossomed in too retired a shade—the coolness of a meditative habit, which diffuses itself through the feeling and observation of every sketch. Instead of passion there is sentiment; and, even in what purport to be pictures of actual life, we have allegory, not always so warmly dressed in its habiliments of flesh and blood as to be taken into the reader's mind without a shiver. Whether from lack of power, or an unconquerable reserve, the Author's touches have often an effect of tameness; the merriest man can hardly contrive to laugh at his broadest humour; the tenderest woman, one would suppose, will hardly shed warm tears at his deepest pathos. With the foregoing characteristics, proper to the productions of a person in retirement (which happened to be the Author's category at the time), the book is devoid of others that we should quite as naturally look for. The sketches are not, it is hardly necessary to say, profound; but it is

rather more remarkable that they so seldom, if ever, show any design on the writer's part to make them so. They have none of the abstruseness of idea, or obscurity of expression, which mark the written communications of a solitary mind within itself. They never need translation. It is, in fact, the style of a man of society. Every sentence, so far as it embodies thought or sensibility, may be understood and felt by anybody who will give himself the trouble to read it, and will take up the book in a proper mood. This statement of apparently opposite peculiarities leads us to a perception of what the sketches truly are. They are not the talk of a secluded man with his own mind and heart (had it been so, they could hardly have failed to be more deeply and permanently valuable), but his attempts, and very imperfectly successful ones, to open an intercourse with the world."

This passage contains some of the truest and finest, touches in the way of literary self-criticism with which I am acquainted; but it does not, as I said, do justice to the undeveloped germs of power in many of the pieces comprised in this and Hawthorne's other collections of short tales. It is true, indeed, that, throughout almost all he wrote, sentiment takes the place of passion, and it is not seldom true, though it by no means holds of the majority of his finished studies of character, that, in the place of "pictures of actual life, we have allegory not always so warmly dressed in its habiliments of flesh and blood as to be taken into the reader's mind without a shiver." But there is enough even in the early tales of which Hawthorne here speaks to prove that the allegorical turn which his tales are apt to take was not with him, as it often is, a sign of meagre or shallow imaginative endowments,—a proof that fancy predominated in him rather than genuine imagination.

When a man sits down professing to paint human life and character, and in place thereof succeeds only in representing abstract virtues, vices, passions, and the like, under human names, we may fairly say that with him the allegorical vein proves the general poverty of his spiritual blood. He has peeled off the outer surface where he professed to model the substance. But when, on the other hand, the same truth, which by an ordinary intellect would be expressed in a purely abstract form naturally takes shape in a man's mind under an imaginative clothing which savours of allegory, no inference of the kind is legitimate. In the one case the allegory is a degenerate romance, in the other it is a thought expressing itself in the language of the imagination. The weakness in the former case is measured by the inability of the imagination to see the broad chasm between the reality and the allegorical shadow. In the latter case there is no such inability, but the thought which would have entered an ordinary mind in a purely abstract form presents itself to this in the form of a distinct shadow-picture.

And it is a sign that Hawthorne's genius has not the weakness usually belonging to allegorists, that the longer a subject rests in his mind, the more certainly do the allegorical shadows of its first outline gather solidity of form and variety of colour, and gradually substantiate themselves into real though dimly-lighted figures. In the ideal situation as it first presents itself to the author's mind, the places of the human actors are perhaps occu-

pied by appropriate symbols of some predominant sentiment or characteristic which each of the group subsequently embodies. If written down in that faint early form, the tale seems allegorical. But if allowed to lie by in the imagination, it deepens into a pallid dramatic situation; a body of human life and character gathers round, and clothes each of the ideal skeletons in the original plan, turning the faint allegory into a chapter of human experience. So clearly did Edgar Poe perceive this vein of genuine imaginative power in Hawthorne's writings, even at a time when he had published only his shorter tales, that he boldly asserted,—in this, as I think, overleaping the truth,—that the conspicuously ideal scaffoldings of Hawthorne's stories were but the monstrous fruits of the bad transcendental atmosphere which he had breathed so long,—the sign of the Emersonian school of thought in which he had studied. "He is infinitely too fond of allegory," said Edgar Poe, "and can never hope for popularity so long as he persists in it. This he will *not* do, for allegory is at war with the whole tone of his nature, which disports itself never so well as when escaping from the mysticism of his Goodman Browns and White Old Maids into the hearty, genial, but still Indian-summer sunshine of his Wakefields and Little Annie's Rambles. Indeed, his spirit of metaphor run mad is clearly imbibed from the phalanx and phalanstery atmosphere in which he has been so long struggling for truth. He has not half the material for the exclusiveness of authorship that he possesses for its

universality. He has the purest style, the finest taste, the most available scholarship, the most delicate humour, the most touching pathos, the most radiant imagination, the most consummate ingenuity, and with these varied good qualities he has done *well* as a mystic. But is there any one of these qualities which should prevent his doing doubly well in a career of honest, upright, sensible, prehensible, and comprehensible things? Let him mend his pen, get a bottle of visible ink, come out from the Old Manse, cut Mr. Alcott, hang (if possible) the editor of the 'Dial,' and throw out of the window to the pigs all his odd numbers of the 'North-American Review.'"

The caustic American critic was, I think, confusing two things in this brief summary of Hawthorne's qualifications and deficiencies. He saw that Hawthorne could produce the most skilful studies from real life, as, for instance—to take one amongst many—in his sketch of the old Apple Dealer; he saw also that almost all his tales proper embodied an idea or a truth, and he thought the former the natural bent of Hawthorne's mind, the latter the imported mannerism of a clique. But the truth is, that both are equally natural to him, the pale transparency of an idea being quite as essential to him in putting together a tale as an unlimited store of exciting emergencies is to Fennimore Cooper or G. P. R. James, or a picturesque episode in history to Sir Walter Scott. Hawthorne could never weave his studies of human nature into a continuous narrative, based on mere circumstantial incident and striking

adventure. The constructive talent, probably the special tastes and interests, requisite for that kind of framework of a tale were not a part of his genius. He must have a ghostly centre of his own, or he could not write at all.

His power over his readers always arises from much the same cause as that of his own fanciful creation,—the minister who wore the black veil as a symbol of the veil which is on all hearts, and who startled men less because he was hidden from their view than because he made them aware of their own solitude. "Why do you tremble at *me alone?*" says the mild old man on his deathbed, from beneath his black veil, and with the glimmering smile on his half-hidden lips, "tremble also at each other? Have men avoided me, and women shown no pity, and children screamed and fled only from my black veil? What but the mystery which it obscurely typifies has made this piece of crape so awful? When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend, the lover to his best beloved, when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin, then deem me a monster for the symbol beneath which I have lived and died! I look around me, and lo! on every visage a black veil!" Hawthorne, with the pale melancholy smile that seems to be always on his lips, speaks from a somewhat similar solitude. Indeed I suspect the story was a kind of parable of his own experience.

But, though Hawthorne's imagination was a solitary and twilight one, there was nothing allegorical about his

genius. If we want to find his power at the very highest, we must look to his instinctive knowledge of what we may call the laws, not exactly of *discordant* emotions, but of emotions which *ought* to be mutually exclusive, and which combine with the thrill and the shudder of disease. This is almost the antithesis of Allegory. And he makes his delineation of such "unblest unions" the more striking, because it stands out from a background of healthy life, of genial scenes and simple beauties, which renders the contrast the more thrilling. I have often heard the term "cobweby" applied to his romances; and their most marking passages certainly cause the same sense of unwelcome shrinking to the spirit which a line of unexpected cobweb suddenly drawn across the face causes physically when one enters a deserted but familiar room. Edgar Poe, indeed, is much fuller of uncanny terrors; but then there is nothing in his writings of the healthy, simple, and natural background which gives sin and disease all its horror. It is the pure and severe New England simplicity which Hawthorne paints so delicately that brings out in full relief the adulterous mixture of emotions on which he spends his main strength. I might almost say that he has carried into human affairs the old Calvinistic type of imagination. The same strange combination of clear simplicity, high faith, and reverential reality, with a reluctant, but for that very reason intense and devouring, conviction of the large comprehensiveness of the Divine Damnation, which that

grim creed taught its most honest believers to consider as the true trust in God's providence, Hawthorne copies into his pictures of human life. He presents us with a scene of pale severe beauty, full of truthful goodness, and then he uncovers in some one point of it a plague-spot, that, half-concealed as he keeps it, yet runs away with the imagination till one is scarcely conscious of anything else. Just as Calvinism, with all its noble features, can never keep its eyes off that one fact, as it thinks it, of God's calm foreknowledge of a wide-spread damnation; and this gradually encroaches on the attention till the mind is utterly absorbed in the fascinating terror of the problem how to combine the clashing emotions of love and horror which its image of Him inspires;—so Hawthorne's finest tales, with all the simplicity of their general outline, never detain you long from some uneasy mixture of emotions which only disease can combine in the same subject, until at last you ask for nothing but the disentangling of the infected web.

There are many illustrations of this peculiarity of Hawthorne's genius in his earlier and shorter tales. In one of them he exclaims, and it is the key to his genius, "Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blazes of the infernal regions." The tale in which Hawthorne makes this remark, 'Rappacini's Daughter,' itself exemplifies in a somewhat fanciful but striking form this constant bent of his imagination. Dr. Rappacini is a professor of medical

science in the University of Padua. He has devoted himself to the study of deadly poisons, and learnt how to infuse them so subtly into both animal and vegetable natures as to render that which would be fatal in the ordinary way, essential to life and health, and even productive of unusual lustre and bloom. Hawthorne has evidently based his tale on the physiological fact—which, at least in the case of arsenic, is well attested—that a malignant poison, if gradually administered, may at length become a condition of life and conducive to beauty. Dr. Rappacini has filled his garden with flowers so poisonous that he himself dare not touch them, and can scarcely venture to breathe the air around them. But the life of his daughter Beatrice has been imbued and fed with the same poisons which give so rich a bloom and so sweet but deadly a perfume to these rare plants; and to her they are health and added loveliness. Her breath is instantly fatal to the insect or the butterfly that drinks it in, and even her touch is deadly. But her heart is stainless and noble, and she shudders herself at the malign influences which she involuntarily puts forth as insects fall dead around her. Her great beauty fascinates one of the students, whose lodging looks out above this strange garden; and by Rappacini's skill, exercised without the young man's knowledge, he is gradually imbued with the same poisons which enter so deeply into the life and constitution of Beatrice. The point and art of this eerie tale lie in the conflict of emotions which Beatrice's true spiritual beauty and malignant physical

influences raise in the mind of her lover, filling him with a passion blended equally of love and horror; and in the description of the despair with which he discovers that the same malignant influences are already part of himself.

The same tendency of imagination, in perhaps quite as characteristic, but in a far more unpleasant form, is shown in the tale called the 'Birth-Mark,' which turns on the morbid horror inspired by a slight birth-mark on the cheek of a beautiful woman in the mind of her husband, who is at the same time passionately attached to her and bent on eradicating it. This tale has no imaginative beauty, and is only remarkable for the diseased mixture of emotions which it depicts. Again, in the tale concerning 'The Man with the Snake in his Bosom,' and 'Young Goodman Brown,' with all the most remarkable of Hawthorne's shorter tales, the same prominent feature, in some form or other, may be discerned.

But it is in the more elaborate tales that Hawthorne has most scope, at once for the relieving elements which these morbid interests, if they are to be artistically treated at all, especially require, and for the fuller development and *justification*, so to say, of emotions so subtle and unhealthy. In the 'Scarlet Letter' he has a subject naturally so painful as exactly to suit his genius. He treats it with perfect delicacy, for his attention is turned to the morbid anatomy of the relations which have originated in the sin of adultery, rather than to the sin itself. There are two points on which Hawthorne con-

centrates his power in this remarkable book. The first is the false position of the minister, who gains fresh reverence and popularity as the very fruit of the passionate anguish with which his heart is consumed. Frantic with the stings of unacknowledged guilt, he is yet taught by those very stings to understand the hearts and stir the consciences of others. His character is a pre-Raphaelite picture of the tainted motives which fill a weak but fine and sensitive nature when placed in such a position; of self-hatred quite too passionate to conquer self-love; of a quailing conscience smothered into insane cravings for blasphemy; of the exquisite pain of gratified ambition conscious of its shameful falsehood. The second point on which Hawthorne concentrates his power is the delineation of anomalous characteristics in the child who is the offspring of this sinful passion. He gives her an inheritance of a lawless, mischievous, and elfish nature, not devoid of strong affections, but delighting to probe the very sorest points of her mother's heart, induced in part by some mysterious fascination to the subject, in part by wanton mischief. The scarlet A which is the brand of her mother's shame, is the child's delight. She will not approach her mother unless the A be on her bosom; and the unnatural complication of emotions thus excited in Hester Prynne's heart presents one of the most characteristic features of the book, and are painfully engraved on the reader's mind.

The scene of most marvellous power which the book contains contrives to draw to a focus all the many clash-

ing affections portrayed. Mr. Dimmesdale, the unhappy minister, eager to invent vain penances in expiation of the guilt which he dares not avow, creeps out at midnight in his canonical robe to stand for an hour on the scaffold on which Hester and her child had been pilloried years before. It is the night when many are watching by the dying-bed of the governor of Massachusetts, and one of the minister's reverend colleagues, who has been praying with the governor, passes under the scaffold, lantern in hand. In his nervous and excited mood, Dimmesdale almost addresses him aloud, and then, paralysed by dread and his limbs stiffened by cold, it occurs to him that he will never be able to descend the steps of the scaffold, and that morning will break to show him there to all his revering flock :—

"Morning would break, and find him there. The neighbourhood would begin to rouse itself. The earliest riser, coming forth in the dim twilight, would perceive a vaguely-defined figure aloft on the place of shame; and half crazed betwixt alarm and curiosity, would go knocking from door to door, summoning all the people to behold the ghost—as he needs must think it—of some defunct transgressor. A dusky tumult would flap its wings from one house to another. Then—the morning light still waxing stronger—old patriarchs would rise up in great haste, each in his flannel gown, and matronly dames without pausing to put off their night gear. The whole tribe of decorous personages, who had never heretofore been seen with a single hair of their heads awry, would start into public view with the disorder of a nightmare in their aspects. Old Governor Bellingham would come grimly forth, with his King James' ruff fastened askew; and Mistress Hibbins, with some twigs of the forest clinging to her skirts, and looking sourer than ever, as having hardly got a wink of sleep after her night ride; and good Father Wilson too, after spending half the night at a deathbed, and liking

ill to be disturbed thus early out of his dreams about the glorified saints. Hither likewise would come the elders and deacons of Mr. Dimmesdale's church, and the young virgins who so idolised their minister, and had made a shrine for him in their white bosoms; which now, by the by, in their hurry and confusion, they would scantily have given themselves time to cover with their kerchiefs. All people, in a word, would come stumbling over their thresholds, and turning up their amazed and horror-stricken visages around the scaffold. Whom would they discern there, with the red eastern light upon his brow? Whom, but the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, half-frozen to death, overwhelmed with shame, and standing where Hester Prynne had stood!

Carried away by the grotesque horror of this picture, the minister, unawares, and to his own infinite alarm, burst into a great peal of laughter. It was immediately responded to by a light, airy, childish laugh, in which, with a thrill of the heart—but he knew not whether of exquisite pain, or pleasure as acute—he recognised the tones of little Pearl.

'Pearl! Little Pearl!' cried he, after a moment's pause; then, suppressing his voice, 'Hester! Hester Prynne! Are you there?' 'Yes; it is Hester Prynne!' she replied, in a tone of surprise; and the minister heard her footsteps approaching from the side-walk, along which she had been passing. 'It is I, and my little Pearl.' 'Whence come you, Hester?' asked the minister. 'What sent you hither?' 'I have been watching at a death-bed,' answered Hester Prynne; 'at Governor Winthrop's death-bed, and have taken his measure for a robe, and am now going homeward to my dwelling.' 'Come up hither, Hester, thou and little Pearl,' said the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. 'Ye have both been here before, but I was not with you. Come up hither once again, and we will stand all three together.'

She silently ascended the steps, and stood on the platform, holding little Pearl by the hand. The minister felt for the child's other hand, and took it. The moment that he did so, there came what seemed a tumultuous rush of new life, other life than his own, pouring like a torrent into his heart, and hurrying through all his veins, as if the mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system. The three formed an electric chain.

"Minister!' whispered little Pearl. 'What wouldst thou say, child?' asked Mr. Dimmesdale. 'Wilt thou stand here with mother and me, to-morrow noontide?' inquired Pearl. 'Nay; not so, my little Pearl,' answered the minister; for, with the new energy of the moment, all the dread of public exposure, that had so long been the anguish of his life, had returned upon him; and he was already trembling at the conjunction in which, with a strange joy nevertheless, he now found himself,—'not so, my child. I shall indeed stand with thy mother and thee one other day, but not to-morrow.'

Pearl laughed, and attempted to pull away her hand. But the minister held it fast. 'A moment longer, my child!' said he. 'But wilt thou promise,' asked Pearl, 'to take my hand, and mother's hand, to-morrow noontide?'"

At this moment a sudden meteoric light flashes across the sky, and lights up the scaffold; after describing it the tale proceeds:—

"There was a singular circumstance that characterised Mr. Dimmesdale's psychological state at this moment. All the time that he gazed upward to the zenith, he was nevertheless perfectly aware that little Pearl was pointing her finger towards old Roger Chillingworth, who stood at no great distance from the scaffold. The minister appeared to see him with the same glance that discerned the miraculous letter. To his features, as to all other objects, the meteoric light imparted a new expression; or it might well be that the physician was not careful then, as at all other times, to hide the malevolence with which he looked upon his victim. Certainly, if the meteor kindled up the sky, and disclosed the earth, with an awfulness that admonished Hester Prynne and the clergyman of the day of judgment, then might Roger Chillingworth have passed with them for the arch-fiend, standing there with a smile and scowl to claim his own. So vivid was the expression, or so intense the minister's perception of it, that it seemed still to remain painted on the darkness, after the meteor had vanished, with an effect as if the street and all things else were at once annihilated.

'Who is that man, Hester?' gasped Mr. Dimmesdale, overcome

with terror. 'I shiver at him! Dost thou know the man? I hate him, Hester!'

She remembered her oath, and was silent.

'I tell thee, my soul shivers at him!' muttered the minister again. 'Who is he? Who is he? Canst thou do nothing for me? I have a nameless horror of the man!'

'Minister,' said little Pearl, 'I can tell thee who he is.'

'Quickly, then, child!' said the minister, bending his ear close to her lips. 'Quickly! and as low as thou canst whisper.'

Pearl mumbled something into his ear that sounded, indeed, like human language, but was only such gibberish as children may be heard amusing themselves with by the hour together. At all events, if it involved any secret information in regard to old Roger Chillingworth, it was in a tongue unknown to the erudite clergyman, and did but increase the bewilderment of his mind. The elvish child then laughed aloud."

This strange vigil, the grim hysteric humour of the minister, the proud and silent fortitude of Hester, the mocking laughter of the child as she detects her unknown father's cowardice, together make as weird-like a tangle of human elements as ever bubbled together in a witches' caldron. Yet this scene, though probably the most powerful which Hawthorne ever painted, scarcely exemplifies his uncanny fashion of awakening the most mutually-repellent feelings at the same moment towards the same person so characteristically as many of his other tales.

In the most striking chapter of the 'House of the Seven Gables,' Hawthorne makes Judge Pyncheon, who has died in his chair from a sudden effusion of blood, holding his still ticking watch in his hand, a subject at once for awe and scorn. He recalls all the judge's engagements for the day,—the bank-meeting at which he was

to take the chair,—the business appointment he was to keep,—the private purchases he was to make,—the little act of charity which he had thought of, time and purse permitting,—the half-formal call on his physician concerning some trifling symptoms of indisposition,—the political dinner to discuss the election of the next State Governor; and then he taunts the judge with his forgetfulness. He had resolved to spend only half-an-hour in this house. "Half-an-hour! Why, judge, it is already two hours by your own undeviatingly accurate chronometer. Glance your eye down on it and see. Ah! he will not give himself the trouble either to bend his head or elevate his hand, so as to bring the faithful time-keeper within his range of vision. Time all at once appears to have become a matter of no moment with the judge!" And so Hawthorne goes on through the list of his engagements, reminding him separately of each as the time comes for it, recalling to the dead man the importance he had attached to it when he made his plans in the morning. The private dinner would, in all probability, determine the next election,—and Judge Pyncheon was a candidate, and with rare chances of success. "Make haste, then; do your part! . . . . . Drink a glass or two of that noble wine!—make your pledges in as low a whisper as you will—and you rise up from table virtually governor of the glorious old State—Governor Pyncheon of Massachusetts! And is there no potent and exhilarating cordial in a certainty like this? It has been the grand purpose of half your

lifetime to obtain it. Now, when there needs little more than to signify your acceptance, why do you sit so lumpishly in your great-grandfather's old chair, as if preferring it to the gubernatorial one?" Thus Hawthorne goes on throughout the twenty-four hours during which the judge's body remains undiscovered,—mingling with the most powerful picture of the supernatural side of death, which he never ceases to keep vividly before us, the feelings that cluster round petty business, the sarcasms that might sting the sensitive, the urgency that might hasten the dilatory, the incentives that would spur the ambitious, flinging them all in cold irony at the corpse with an eerie effect that only Hawthorne could produce.

But the most characteristic instance of Hawthorne's power in studying combinations of emotions that are as it were at once abhorrent to nature and true to life, is in 'Transformation.' The one powerful scene in that distended work is the scene of crime. The young Tuscan Count Donatello,—the "natural man" of the book, who is rumoured to be a descendant of an ancient Faun, and described in the opening of the tale as possessed only of the happy spontaneous life of the natural creatures, but who is afterwards awakened to the higher responsibilities and life of man by his remorse for an impulsive crime,—has fallen in love with Miriam, a lady artist of warm and passionate nature, high powers, and mysterious origin. This young lady is pursued by some half-madman, half-demon, who from some (unexplained)

connection with her previous life has power to torment her by his threats to the very verge of unsettling her reason. Walking with Donatello, one moonlight night, at a little distance from their party, on the verge of the Tarpeian rock, this tormenting being is discovered, dogging her footsteps as usual, under the shadow of an archway. Donatello seizes him, holds him over the precipice, catches Miriam's eye, reads in it eager and fierce assent to the act he is meditating, and drops him down; there is a dead thump on the stones below and all is over. Up to this instant Miriam had felt nothing but pity for her young lover. Now for the first time, in this hideous moment, horror and love are born together in her breast, and the monstrous birth, the delirium of love born in blood, is thus powerfully described;—except, by the way, that Miriam certainly never addressed Donatello at such a moment as "Oh, friend!" either "with heavy richness of meaning" or otherwise, and that this is a sentimental blot on Hawthorne's picture.

"'Did you not mean that he should die?' sternly asked Donatello, still in the glow of that intelligence which passion had developed in him. 'There was short time to weigh the matter; but he had his trial in that breath or two, while I held him over the cliff, and his sentence in that one glance, when your eyes responded to mine! Say that I have slain him against your will—say that he died without your whole consent—and in another breath, you shall see me lying beside him.' 'Oh, never!' cried Miriam. 'My one own friend! Never, never, never!' She turned to him—the guilty, blood-stained, lonely woman—she turned to her fellow-criminal, the youth so lately innocent, whom she had drawn into her doom. She pressed him close, close to her bosom; with a clinging embrace that brought their two hearts together, till the horror and agony of each

was combined into one emotion, and that a kind of rapture. 'Yes, Donatello, you speak the truth!' said she; 'my heart consented to what you did. We two slew yonder wretch. The deed knots us together for time and eternity, like the coil of a serpent!' They threw one other glance at the heap of death below, to assure themselves that it was there; so like a dream was the whole thing. Then they turned from that fatal precipice, and came out of the court-yard, arm in arm, heart in heart. Instinctively, they were heedful not to sever themselves so much as a pace or two from one another, for fear of the terror and deadly chill that would thenceforth wait for them in solitude. Their deed—the crime which Donatello wrought, and Miriam accepted on the instant—had wreathed itself, as she said, like a serpent, in inextricable links about both their souls, and drew them into one by its terrible contractile power. It was closer than a marriage-bond. So intimate, in those first moments, was the union that it seemed as if their new sympathy annihilated all other ties, and that they were released from the chain of humanity; a new sphere, a special law, had been created for them alone. The world could not come near them; they were safe! . . . . 'Oh, friend,' cried Miriam, so putting her soul into that word that it took a heavy richness of meaning. and seemed never to have been spoken before,—'oh, friend, are you conscious, as I am, of this companionship that knits our heart-strings together?' 'I feel it, Miriam,' said Donatello. 'We draw one breath; we live one life!' 'Only yesterday,' continued Miriam; 'nay, only a short half-hour ago, I shivered in an icy solitude. No friendship, no sisterhood, could come near enough to keep the warmth within my heart. In an instant, all is changed! There can be no more loneliness!' 'None, Miriam!' said Donatello. 'None, my beautiful one!' responded Miriam, gazing in his face, which had taken a higher, almost an heroic aspect from the strength of passion. 'None, my innocent one! Surely, it is no crime that we have committed. One wretched and worthless life has been sacrificed, to cement two other lives for evermore.' 'For evermore, Miriam!' said Donatello; 'cemented with his blood!' The young man started at the word which he had himself spoken; it may be that it brought home, to the simplicity of his imagination, what he had not before dreamed of—the ever-increasing loathsomeness of a union that consists in guilt. Cemented with blood, which would corrupt and grow

more noisome for ever and for ever, but bind them not the less strictly for that!' 'Forget it! Cast it all behind you!' said Miriam, detecting, by her sympathy, the pang that was in his heart. 'The deed has done its office, and has no existence any more.' They flung the past behind them, as she counselled, or else distilled from it a fiery intoxication, which sufficed to carry them triumphantly through those first moments of their doom. For guilt has its moment of rapture too. The foremost result of a broken law is ever an ecstatic sense of freedom. And thus there exhaled upward (out of their dark sympathy, at the base of which lay a human corpse) a bliss, or an insanity, which the unhappy pair imagined to be well worth the sleepy innocence that was for ever lost to them. As their spirits rose to the solemn madness of the occasion, they went onward—not stealthily, not fearfully—but with a stately gait and aspect. Passion lent them (as it does to meaner shapes) its brief nobility of carriage. They trode through the streets of Rome as if they too were among the majestic and guilty shadows that, from ages long gone by, have haunted the blood-stained city."

This is very finely conceived and yet revolting. Have I not reason for saying, that Hawthorne's chief power lies in the delineation of unnatural alliances of feeling, which are yet painfully real,—of curdling emotions that may mix for a moment, but shrink apart again quickly, as running water from clotted blood?

But it would be very unjust to Hawthorne to represent him as in any degree addicted, like Edgar Poe, to the invention of monstrosities and horrors. I only mean that his genius naturally leads him to the analysis and representation of certain outlying moral anomalies, which are not the anomalies of ordinary evil and sin, but have a certain chilling unnaturalness of their own. But under Hawthorne's treatment these anomalies are

only the subtle flaws or passionate taints of natures full of fine elements; they are never superlatives of iniquity and abomination, like Edgar Poe's. They are the dark spots in a fine picture, never the very substance of the whole. There is, for instance, every palliation which a charitable imagination can invent for Hester's sin and Dimmesdale's cowardice in the 'Scarlet Letter;' and even the child's elfish wantonness, though in some degree preternatural, is not demoniacal, but the mere lawless taint in an otherwise warm and open heart. So too in 'Transformation' there is every excuse that circumstances can give to the crime which Donatello commits and Miriam sanctions;—after the first moment of mad excitement is over, it fills them with unspeakable anguish; it rouses all the tender devotion of the woman in Miriam for the man who had thus stained his conscience under the impulse of love to her; it awakens the sleeping soul of Donatello;—and the book is meant to record their uninterrupted upward progress from that moment. Moreover, in the two other characters we find a peaceful contrast to the turbid hearts of the sinful lovers. Neither in this nor in any other tale does Hawthorne cast any slur on human nature. He loves to picture it in its highest and tenderest aspects. And when he delineates what is revolting, one of the main elements that makes it so revolting is the Manichean incarceration of some noble and half-angelic affection in a malignant body of evil, from which it vainly seeks to be divorced.

This bent of Hawthorne's genius is no doubt in great

degree determined by the lonely wistfulness of his mind. Even his *imagination* is inquisitive and—if I may call it what he calls it himself in the 'Blithedale Romance' —rather *prying* than ardent. It is curious to find that Hawthorne was a descendant of the "witch-judge,"—the Hawthorne of whom Longfellow introduced a sketch into his New England tragedies. One might fancy that Hawthorne had inherited not a little of the eeriness of the spiritual inquisitor without any touch of his cruelty, —except so far as a passionless curiosity which is very little agitated by sympathy, even where it is analysing painful subjects, may popularly (and very unjustly) be confused with cruelty. But it is not only the inquisitorial side of Hawthorne's cold fancy which seems to connect him with his ancestor the "witch-judge." There seems to have been in him a considerable vein of what would probably very unjustly be called superstition,—*i. e.*, a special attraction towards the morbid side of mental phenomena, with, perhaps, an undue tendency to credulity. As to the credulity, I am not sure. It may well be that Hawthorne believed no more of the so-called *science* of mesmeric and spiritualistic phenomena than the most acute and incredulous men of his society. But that he was specially fascinated by these morbid phenomena, as by all morbid phenomena of human nature, is proved by a vast number of passages in his various note-books, as well as by the subjects of his novels.

His notes are full of suggestions for imaginative inquisitions into morbid subjects. In one page we find a

suggestion, more cynical and less preternatural than usual, that two persons might make their wills in each other's favour, and then wait impatiently for the death of the other, till each was informed that the long-desired event had taken place, and hastening to be present at the other's funeral, they might meet each other in perfect health; in another page we find noted down, "Curious to imagine what murmurings and discontent would be excited if any of the great so-called calamities of human beings were to be abolished,—as, for instance, death;"—again we have a suggestion for a new sort of reading of Boccaccio's story of Isabel, that a girl, not knowing her lover to be dead and buried in her own garden, might yet feel an indescribable impulse of attraction towards the flowers growing out of his grave, might find them of admirable splendour, beauty, and perfume, and rejoice in keeping them in her bosom and scenting her room with them. Again, on another page we have a suggested sketch of a man who tries to be happy in love, but who cannot really give his heart, or prevent the affair from seeming a pure dream;—in domestic life, in politics, in every sphere it is to be the same,—he is to seem a patriot, and care nothing really for his country, only *try* to care; he is to seem the kindest of sons and brothers, but feel the whole relation unreal; in a word, he is to be wholly "detached" from life, like a Roman Catholic monk or nun, but without that life in another world after which they aim. These are only a very few specimens of the fascination with

which Hawthorne's fancy dwells on morbid psychology as his natural subject. There are but few pages in his Note-books which do not afford examples of the same thing. Hawthorne seems to illustrate his contemporary and friend Dr. Holmes's theory that we are each of us a sort of physiological and psychological omnibus for bringing back our ancestors in new shapes and under different conditions to this earth. The "witch-judge," associating himself perhaps with some more literary ancestor of Hawthorne's, reappeared in this most original of American novelists. Hawthorne was a novelist *because* he was an intellectual and moral inquisitor. "Inquisitor and novelist," would describe him even better than "novelist and inquisitor,"—always carefully expelling, of course, all notion of torture from the inquisitorial character of his imagination.

Hawthorne's genius, then, is fertile, but in a cold and restless way. It is used more to help him to explore mysteries than in obedience to the glowing creative impulse that cannot choose but paint. He states to himself a problem, and sets his imagination to work to solve it. How was it the woman felt who wore publicly the symbol of her own sin and shame fancifully embroidered on her bosom? What would be the state of mind of one who had unhappily killed another, and could never clearly determine in his own conscience whether his *will* had consented to the deed or not? What would be the result of a wrongful life-imprisonment on a soft æsthetic nature made for the enjoyment of the beautiful? How would a

sin of passsion work on a healthy, innocent, natural man of unawakened spirit? These are the kind of hypotheses on which Hawthorne's imagination works; and from the nature of the case, images summoned up in obedience to such questionings cannot always be of a very wholesome kind. The problems that Hawthorne starts are usually connected with the deepest mysteries of the human mind and conscience; and the imagination which attempts to keep pace with the inquisitive intellect cannot but paint strange and thrilling anomalies in reply to its queries.

"That cold tendency," says Mr. Coverdale, the hero of the 'Blithedale Romance,' who has many points of intellectual affinity with its author,—"that cold tendency between instinct and intellect, which made me pry with a speculative interest into people's passions and impulses, appeared to have gone far towards unhumanising my heart." I do not suppose that it went far, or any way at all, towards unhumanising Hawthorne's heart, which was evidently tender. But no doubt, he is led by the speculative bias of his mind to steep his imagination in *arcana* on which it is scarcely good to gaze at all.

It is remarkable, and perhaps a symptom of the same imaginative constitution, that while Hawthorne has the most eager desire to penetrate the secret attitudes of minds painfully or anomalously situated, he has little or no interest in picturing the exact combination of circumstances which brought them into these attitudes. His imagination is the very converse of De Foe's. De Foe seizes the outer fact with the most vivid force; indirectly

only, by the very force and minuteness of his conception of the visible circumstances, actions, and gestures he narrates, do you get at the inward mind of his characters. Hawthorne, on the contrary, is often positively anxious to *suppress* all distinct account of the actual facts which have given rise to his ideal situations. He wishes to save the mental impression from being swallowed up, so to say, in the interest of the outward facts and events. He sees that people of a matter-of-fact turn of mind attach more value to knowing the exciting causes than to knowing the state of mind which results. If they hear what seems to them an insufficient cause for a heroine's misery, they set her down as feeble-minded, and give up their interest in her fate. If they hear a *too* sufficient cause, they say she deserved all she suffered, and for that reason discard her from their sympathies. Hawthorne saw the difficulty of inventing facts that would exactly hit the shade of feeling that he desired to excite in his readers' minds, and so he often refuses to detail the facts distinctly at all. He often gives us our choice of several sets of facts which might be adequate to the results, declines to say which he himself prefers, and insists only on the attitude of mind produced.

Thus, in the 'Blithedale Romance,' he preludes a far from explanatory or lucid conversation with this mystifying sentence, "I hardly could make out an intelligible sentence on either side. What I seem to remember I yet suspect may have been patched together by my fancy in brooding over the matter afterwards." Again, in

another part of the same book, "The details of the interview that followed being unknown to me, while notwithstanding it would be a pity quite to lose the picturesqueness of the situation, I shall attempt to sketch it mainly from fancy, although with some general grounds of surmise in regard to the old man's feelings." But he carried this preference for delineating states of mind, and obscurely suggesting the class of facts which may have given rise to them, to the furthest point in his last novel, 'Transformation.' "Owing, it may be," he tells us, in a chapter justly headed 'Fragmentary Sentences,' at a critical juncture in the tale, "to this moral estrangement, —this chill remoteness of their position,—there have come to us but a few vague whisperings of what passed in Miriam's interview that afternoon with the sinister personage who had dogged her footsteps ever since her visit to the catacomb. In weaving these mystic utterances into a continuous scene, we undertake a task resembling in its perplexity that of gathering up and piecing together the fragments of a letter which has been torn and scattered to the winds. Many words of deep significance,—many entire sentences, and these probably the most important ones,—have flown too far on the winged breeze to be recovered. If we insert our own conjectural amendments, we may perhaps give a purport utterly at variance with the true one." And then he continues, "Of so much we are sure, that there seemed to be a sadly mysterious fascination in the influence of this ill-omened person over Miriam; it was such as beasts

and reptiles of subtle and evil natures sometimes exercise over their victims. . . . Yet let us trust there may have been no crime in Miriam, but only one of those fatalities which are among the insoluble riddles propounded to mortal comprehension—the fatal doom by which every crime is made to be the agony of many innocent persons, as well as of the single guilty one." In other words, Hawthorne wishes us to picture a mind perturbed, flushed, on the verge of despair, but does not wish us to know how far the exciting causes had involved her in real guilt, or merely in misery. It is not essential, he thinks, to the purpose of the book, which is rather to trace the effects of the subsequent guilt on the relation between Miriam and Donatello than to develop fully the previous character of the woman who draws the poor young Count into crime. As far as regards Miriam, the problem set himself by the author in this book is only to delineate the influence exerted over her heart by Donatello's plunge into guilt on her behalf. He thinks it enough to indicate that she who led Donatello into guilt was either herself guilty, or at least intimately imbued with all the infectious fever of a guilty atmosphere. More is not essential to the author's purpose, and more he will not tell us. He seems to hint, perhaps truly, that the chasm between guilt and wretchedness in a woman's mind is not always so wide as in a man's; and that, at all events, there is as much power in any deeply roused affection to extricate her from the one as from the other. For like reasons, I suppose, the end of the tale

is as shadowy as the beginning. The *transformation* is accomplished: the Faun is no longer a Faun; and all the author contemplated is therefore attained. The wreath of mist which hangs over Miriam's past is allowed also to settle over her own and Donatello's future. The problem has been solved in the dissolving colours of two dimly-outlined minds. And their earthly destiny is nothing to the reader; to know it might even divert his attention from the artist's true purpose, and concentrate it on the *dénouement* of a commonplace story.

This predominance of moral colouring over the definite forms of actual fact in Hawthorne's novels is to me, I confess, unsatisfactory. And the degree to which it is absent or prevails in his several works, seems to me a fair measure of their relative artistic worth. The 'Scarlet Letter,' in which there is by far the most solid basis of fact, is, I think, also considerably the finest and most powerful of his efforts. The 'House of the Seven Gables,' in itself nearly a perfect work of art, is yet composed of altogether thinner materials. Yet the details are worked up with so much care and finish,—the whole external scenery of this, as well as of the 'Scarlet Letter,' is so sharply defined, so full of the clear air of New England life,—that one can bear better the subtle moral colouring and anatomy with which they both abound. In the 'Blithedale Romance' I observe the first tendency to shroud certain portions of the narrative in an intentional veil, and to attempt to paint a distinct moral *expression* without giving a distinct outline of

fact. The effect is powerful, but vague and not satisfying. The figures wander vagrant-like through the imagination of the reader. They seem to have no distinct place of their own assigned to them. You know what sort of characters you have beheld, but not when and under what circumstances you have beheld them. In 'Transformation' these defects are at their maximum; and the evil is exaggerated by the mass of general padding —artistic criticisms, often powerful, and always subtle, upon Italian art;—puffs of the works of American sculptors;—silly attacks upon nude figures, and the like,—which distend, alloy, and ungracefully speckle the ideal tenor of the tale.

Both the novels and the note-books testify to their author's melancholy, though hardly melancholy of a deep order. It is the melancholy of a man with a rather slow flow of blood in his veins, and almost a horror of action, rather than any deep melancholy, which speaks in him. He is always sensible, but always apart from the rest of the world. There is a sort of capillary repulsion between his mind and that of the society in which he mixes, and this it is which gives a slight gloom to the general tone of his observations. "The world is so sad and solemn," he says, "that things meant in jest are liable by an overpowering influence to become dreadful earnest,—gaily dressed fantasies turning to ghostly and black-clad images, of themselves." This was, no doubt, an observation founded on considerable experience of his own mental life, and any one who knows well his minor tales

will be able at once to verify it from them. But there is very little of deep pain in either his criticisms of life or his pictures of it. He pictured real anguish, but more as an anatomist would lay bare a convulsive movement of the nerves, than as a poet would express passion. You feel that you are reading a *study* of human pain, rather than feeling the throb of the pain itself. The melancholy is the meditative and microscopic melancholy of a curious and speculative intelligence; there is little of that imaginative *sympathy* with pain which is at the heart of all true tragedy.

Hawthorne's humour is partly of the same root as his melancholy, springing from slow, close, inquisitive scrutiny of the paradoxes of life,—the humour which is quite as much true criticism as true humour. Take, for example, this observation on one of his children:—"One of the children drawing a cow on the black board says, 'I'll kick this leg out a little more,' *a very happy energy of expression*, completely identifying herself with the cow; *or perhaps as the cow's creator, conscious of full power over its movements.*" Or take the remark, "There is a kind of ludicrous unfitness in the idea of a venerable rose-bush. . . . apple trees, on the other hand, grow old without reproach." Or again, take the following, apparently written at a time when his wife was away, and he had no servant to look after his house:—"The washing of dishes does seem to me the most absurd and unsatisfactory business that I ever undertook. If, when once washed, they would remain clean for ever and ever (which they

ought in all reason to do, considering how much trouble it is) there would be less occasion to grumble; but *no sooner is it done than it requires to be done again.* On the whole, I have come to the resolution not to use more than one dish at each meal." Or this, on a piece of boiled beef which he had boiled himself at great pains and trouble:—"I am at this moment superintending the corned beef, which has been on the fire, as it seems to me, ever since the beginning of time, and shows no symptom of being done before the crack of doom. . . . . The corned beef is exquisitely done, and as tender as a young lady's heart, all owing to my skilful cookery. . . . . To say the truth, I look upon it as such a masterpiece in its way that it seems irreverential to eat it. Things on which so much thought and labour are bestowed should surely be immortal." His humour arises, as it seems to me, in all these cases from the magnifying glass under which he views a somewhat minute phenomenon, till we see its characteristics exaggerated and caricatured in relation to the proportions of ordinary life, and partly also from the humorous but determined resistance which his mind offers to every attempt to subdue it to uncongenial habits. Thus he says elsewhere, "I went to George Hillard's office, and he spoke with immitigable resolution of the necessity of my going to dine with Longfellow before returning to Concord; but I have an almost miraculous power of escaping from necessities of this kind. *Destiny itself has often been worsted in the attempt to get me out to dinner,*" which strikes me as a

stroke of true humour, and true self-knowledge, all in one. His own shy, solitary nature was so averse to any attempt to assimilate it to the temper of ordinary society, that it might truly be said that destiny itself had failed in the attempt to get him to dine out like other folks, just as the most solid masonry often fails to crush a flower, and will even be rent asunder by the upward growth of a tender plant. But besides the truth of the application to himself, there is real humour in the conception of Destiny as trying to get any man "out to dinner." It really is what Destiny seems oftenest to insist upon, and to succeed in, in these days, in spite of enormous obstacles. Hawthorne seldom displayed his humour more finely than in thus depicting the same Destiny which, in the Greek drama, devotes itself to the most sublime tasks, as engaging itself, in this flaccid, and yet in some senses far *more* closely-knit, nineteenth century, in the ignoble task of bringing an irresistible pressure to bear in order to get men to go out to dinner!

The most distinguishing deficiency in Hawthorne's mind, which is also in close connection with its highest power, is his complete want of sympathy not only with the world of voluntary action, but with the next thing to action, namely, the world of impulsive passion. With exceedingly rare exceptions,—the scene of crime and passion which I have quoted from 'Transformation' is the only exception I can recall,—the highest power of Hawthorne is all spent on the delineation of *chronic* suffering or sentiment, in which all desire to act on

others is in a measure paralysed. He likes to get past the rapids any way he can;—as we have seen, he not seldom introduces you to his tale with only the distant rush of them still audible behind you, his delight being to trace the more lasting perturbations which they effect for winding miles below. But what he does paint for you, he likes to study thoroughly; he loves to get beneath the surface, to sound the deeper and mysterious pools, measure the power of the fretted waters, and map carefully out the sandy shallows. The result is necessarily a considerable limitation in the field of his genius. The excitement which other writers find in delineating the swaying fortunes of an active career, he is—I will not say *obliged* to find, for of course the positive capacity of his genius, not its incapacity for other fields, leads him in this direction—but he is obliged to find *only* in curious and often painful pictures of unhealthy sentiment.

This is what circles so closely the range of Hawthorne's characters. They are necessarily very limited both in number and in moral attitude. We have but two studies, in his tales, of characters with any active bent—Hollingsworth in the 'Blithedale Romance,' and Phœbe in the 'House of the Seven Gables.' Both are carefully drawn but both are far slighter sketches, and more evidently taken from observation only, than his other characters. His nearest approach to the delineation of impulsive passion is seen in the sketch of Zenobia in the 'Blithedale Romance,' and of Miriam in 'Transformation.' But in neither case is it real impulse to act on others which he

draws well; it is rather the turbid tossing of a rich mind ill at ease with itself, and casting about for sympathy and help. The characters which he draws most completely,—though they are not always the pleasantest,—are those which, like Mr. Coverdale in the 'Blithedale Romance,' and Holgrave in the 'House of the Seven Gables,' have "no impulse to help or to hinder," caring only "to look on, to analyse, to explain matters to themselves." Clifford too, in the latter tale,—who evidently represents the sensitive and æsthetic side of the author's own mind, "that sqeamish love of the beautiful" (to use his own expressive phrase) which is in him, when stripped of that cold contemplative individuality which seems to me to be at the centre of Hawthorne's literary genius and personality,—is a fine study.

But one criticism more. The moral ideal which Hawthorne keeps before himself and his readers throughout his works is, on the whole, not only pure but noble. It is defective, however, as we might expect, on the same side on which his genius seems to fail. He was, in political and social conviction, a democratic quietist; one might almost say a fatalist. Was it not a part of this fatalistic disposition to encourage the cultivated and thinking portion of society to resign to the masses the duty of forming the political judgment of his nation, and to permit himself to be quietly sucked in by that fatally fascinating and overmastering tide swaying the Will of the democracy? However this may be, in political and social life, he was one who deprecated all spasmodic

reforms, and attached little value to any reformatory efforts, except as the indispensable conditions of generous hopes and youthful aspirations. Speaking of such an experiment of social reform, he said, "After all, let us acknowledge it wise, if not more sagacious, to follow out one's day-dream to its natural consummation, although, if the vision have been worth the having, it is certain never to be consummated otherwise than by a failure." Again he said, in another tale, and with much of true moral insight, though it be the one-sided moral insight of the quietist recluse, "the haughty faith with which he [the enthusiastic practical reformer] began life would be well bartered for a far humbler one at its close, in discerning that man's best-directed effort accomplishes a kind of dream, while God is the sole worker of realities."

Nor should I find fault with him for his very deeply-rooted conviction that, so far as any real and deep reform is accomplished, it may in a certain sense be said to *accomplish itself*, instead of being forced on society by the enthusiastic patronage of crusading philanthropists, had he but confined this theory within modest limits,—had he not pressed it into the service of what seems to me the grossest political immorality. I can sympathise with him when he so finely moralises at the end of the 'Blithedale Romance' on the dangers of philanthropy :—

"Admitting what is called philanthropy, when adopted as a profession, to be often useful by its energetic impulses to society at large, it is perilous to the individual whose ruling passion, in one exclusive channel, it thus becomes. It ruins, or is fearfully apt to ruin, the heart, the rich juices of which God never meant should be

pressed violently out and distilled into alcoholic liquor by an unnatural process; but should render life sweet, bland, and gently beneficent, and insensibly influence other hearts and other lives to the same blessed end."

Yet more; I can even go with him, quite as far as he wishes his readers to go, when he ironically prescribes a universal slumber as the only cure for the world's overstrained nerves:—

"The world should recline its vast head on the first convenient pillow, and take an age-long nap. It has gone distracted through a morbid activity, and while preternaturally wide awake is nevertheless tormented by visions that seem real to it now, but would assume their true aspect and character were all things once set right by an interval of sound repose. This is the only method of getting rid of old delusions and avoiding new ones,—of regenerating our race so that it might in due time awake as an infant out of dewy slumber,—of restoring to us the simple perception of what is right and the single-hearted desire to achieve it, both of which have long been lost in consequence of this weary activity of brain, and torpor or passion of the heart, that now afflict the universe;"—

to which he characteristically added, in a different passage of his writings, his own present yearning for a long and profound sleep of at least a thousand years between Death and Resurrection.

For none of these thoughts and sayings, however depreciative of effort, or destructive of the sanguine hopes with which effort spurs itself on, could I reproach Hawthorne. It is fitting that, after the preacher of one-sided action and overstrained vigilance has spoken, this too restless age should also hear the invitation to distrust its own "earnestness," and renew its highly-strung energies by rest. Nay, the function of the contemplative

man, who keeps clear of the many streams of human energy, and passes his solitary criticisms upon their tendency from some nook of seemingly selfish retirement, is justified in the scheme of Providence by the very existence of the philanthropic class of one-sided workers. But it is when Hawthorne came to apply his quietistic creed to the actual political world in which he lived, that I find his moral shortcomings painfully evident, and see that he had permitted a mere theory to confuse "that simple perception of what is right, and the single-hearted desire to achieve it," of which he speaks so well, as grievously as ever a professional philanthropist was deceived by his one dominant idea.

Little as Hawthorne was disposed to mix in the strife of the political arena, once at least he was not willing to let that *vox populi* in which he placed so much confidence speak without a suggestion from himself. In the little electioneering volume on the life of Franklin Pierce, who was then (in 1852) a candidate, and as it proved a successful candidate, for the Presidency of the United States, Hawthorne offered his suggestion in the form of an application of his theory to the subject of spasmodic philanthropy as exhibited on the question of slavery. The contest, at the time of General Pierce's election, turned, as all the contests then did, chiefly on this question. General Pierce represented the party of conciliation to the South,—the party of union at almost any sacrifice of Northern principles. The fugitive-slave law had just passed, and the higher-minded politicians of

the Northern States were eager to get a reversal of that disgraceful Act. General Pierce had pledged himself to sustain that Act and the whole system of which it was a part, and it was Hawthorne's object to justify the policy of his friend. After condemning the Northern men, who thought that the world stood still except so far as the anti-slavery cause went forward, for their narrowness, he proceeded thus:—

"There is still another view, and probably as wise a one. It looks upon slavery as one of those evils which Divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses shall have been fulfilled, shall vanish like a dream. There is no instance in all history of the human will and intellect having perfected any great moral reform by methods which it adapted to that end; but the progress of the world at every step leaves some evil or wrong on the path behind it, which the wisest of mankind, of their own set purpose, could never have found the way to rectify."[1]

Accordingly, Hawthorne's recommendation to the people of the Northern States was to acquiesce in the Southern encroachments, and trust to Providence for the removal of this foul blot on American institutions. He eulogised General Pierce as "the man who dared to love that great and grand reality—his whole united native country—*better than the mistiness of a philanthropic theory*"[2] And he warned the anti-slavery party, in General Pierce's name, that the evil of disunion would be certain, while the good was "at best a contingency, and (to the clear

[1] Life of 'Franklin Pierce,' pp. 113, 114. [2] Ibid. p. 31.

practical foresight with which he looked into the future) scarcely so much as that, attended as the movement was, and must be during its progress, with the aggravated injury of those whose condition it aimed to ameliorate, and terminating in its possible triumph,—if such possibility there were,—with the ruin of two races which now dwelt together in greater peace and affection, it is not too much to say, than had ever elsewhere existed between the taskmaster and the serf."[3]

This is the most immbral kind of political fatalism. It is true enough, and is often forgotten by philanthropists, that men can do little enough for each other's highest good by any voluntary effort. Most men who undertake such efforts, fall victims not perhaps to the "mistiness" so much as to the narrow definiteness "of philanthropic theory." They forget that philanthropic tastes can only be safely humoured by those who keep constantly before their inmost hearts the exhortation, "Physician, heal thyself." But there is a wide distinction between a philanthropic cause and a concession of the barest justice to the oppressed. Measured by Hawthorne's standard, there would be no criminal national custom, however oppressive, with which it would be our duty to proclaim open war. He might denounce the political advocates of any such war as sacrificing the national peace to the "mistiness of philanthropic theory." Was there, then, no distinction in moral sacredness

[3] 'Life of Franklin Pierce,' pp. 111, 112.

between the claims of schemes for doing good to others, —little good of the deeper kind as we can do for any but ourselves,—and the duty of removing obstructions which entirely blotted out the proper voluntary existence of other men? Was the duty of restoring moral freedom to a whole race to be classed as one of the doubtful visionary philanthropies of modern times? Is it not obvious that, little as we may be able to organise mutual spiritual help of the higher kind, we are most fearfully competent to organise mutual moral injury of the lowest kind, and that slavery was one of the grandest of diabolic devices for that end?

I do not say that Hawthorne was bound to be an anti-slavery agitator. I do say that he prostituted the noblest speculative faculties, when he attempted to perpetuate a fearful national crime on the dishonest plea that those who strove to resist its extension and to limit its duration were endangering the Union for the sake of a "misty philanthropic theory." The fatalism which Hawthorne rather suggested than advocated in 'Transformation,' when he presented sin as the necessary condition of moral growth, received a terrible elucidation when he calmly deprecated all impatient criticism of the providential "uses" of slavery as if they were the affair of Providence alone. In the great civil war, his sympathies, as might be expected, were with the trimming Buchanans and Douglasses of the hour, not with Mr. Lincoln, of whom he spoke slightingly as a man incapable of true statesmanship.

I need scarcely apologise for treating Hawthorne as something more than a mere writer of fiction. His writings have a very wide and justly-deserved influence in America; for as a literary artist, if not in mere rough genius, he may safely be considered almost the first, and quite the highest, fruit of American culture. He himself recognised the close connection between the political and literary condition of nations, in his plea that America was too happy, too prosperous, too free "from any picturesque and gloomy wrong," to be made the scene of a romance. Let me sum up my criticism on his literary deficiencies in a single sentence, by expressing my conviction, that if he had conceded less to his "squeamish love of the beautiful," if he had cultivated a deeper sympathy with action and its responsibilities, he would not only have taken some interest in the removal of wrongs that were gloomy enough whether picturesque or not, but might have widened greatly the range of his artistic power, and deepened indefinitely the spell of the great fascination which he wielded over his countrymen.

THE END.

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